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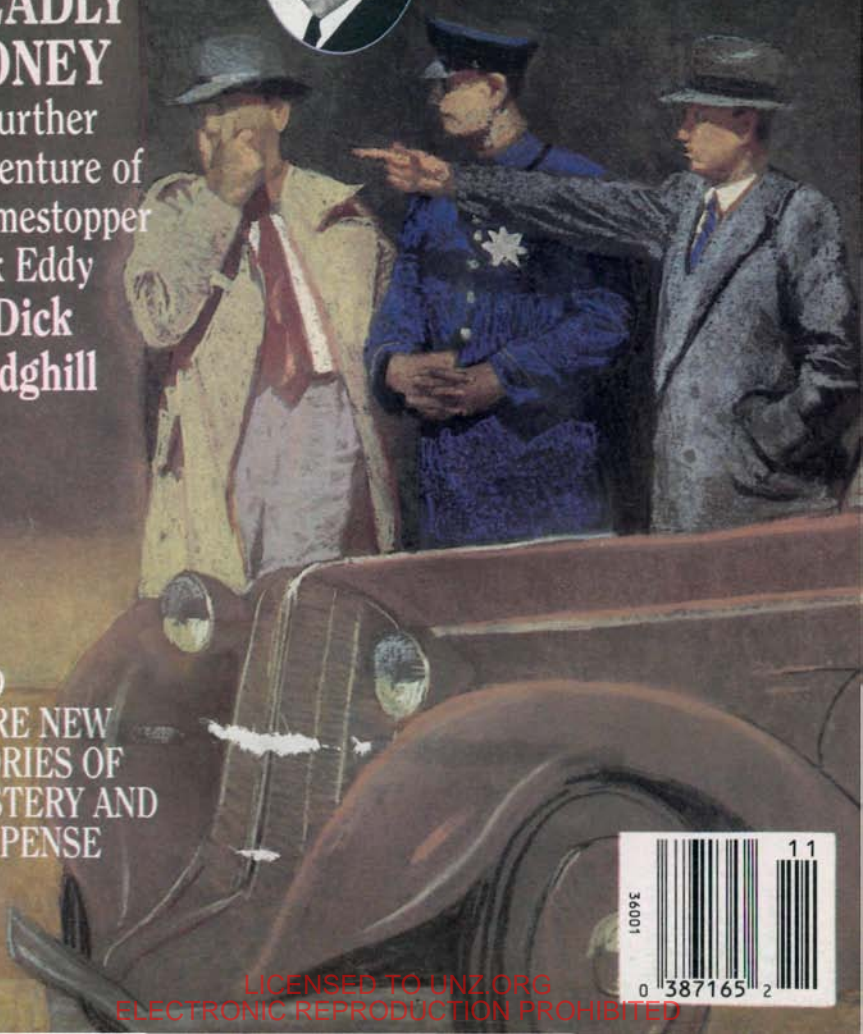
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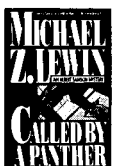
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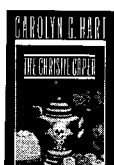
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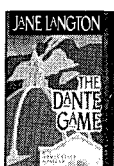
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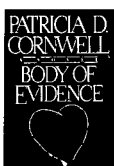
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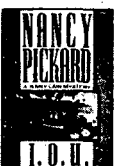
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

In this issue, we introduce three new authors—new to us, anyway. Two have not previously had fiction published.

Richard Taylor, author of "Too Hot," is in the film and video business, script writing and directing. "My script writing has led me into fiction writing," he says. "... When I write about a thirty room mansion, it's nice to know I don't have to find a location for it!" In his spare time Mr. Taylor restores antique cars.

Robert P. Jordan, the author of "Murder Off Blackstone Street," is a librarian who also participates in racewalking and horseback riding. "In college," he tells us, "I worked in a flour mill warehouse. I relearned a lesson from kindergarten: water (i.e., sweat) and

flour make paste. I was able to impersonate the Pillsbury Doughboy once when, loading a hot boxcar in the sun, a hundred pound bag of flour burst in a tidal wave of white, enough to cover me and congeal nicely in a full body cast. My coworkers were much amused as I waddled off to the locker room to shower fully clothed."

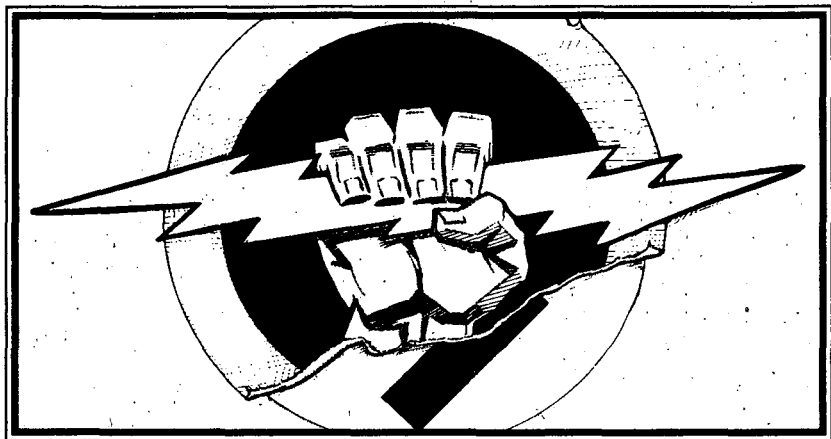
James S. Dorr, author of "The Wellmaster's Daughter," presently works part-time on the clerical staff of an optometry clinic, is a semi-professional musician, playing a tenor recorder at such events as local Renaissance Faires, and writes, mostly science fiction, fantasy, and horror short stories. About twenty stories are in print now in this country and Canada.

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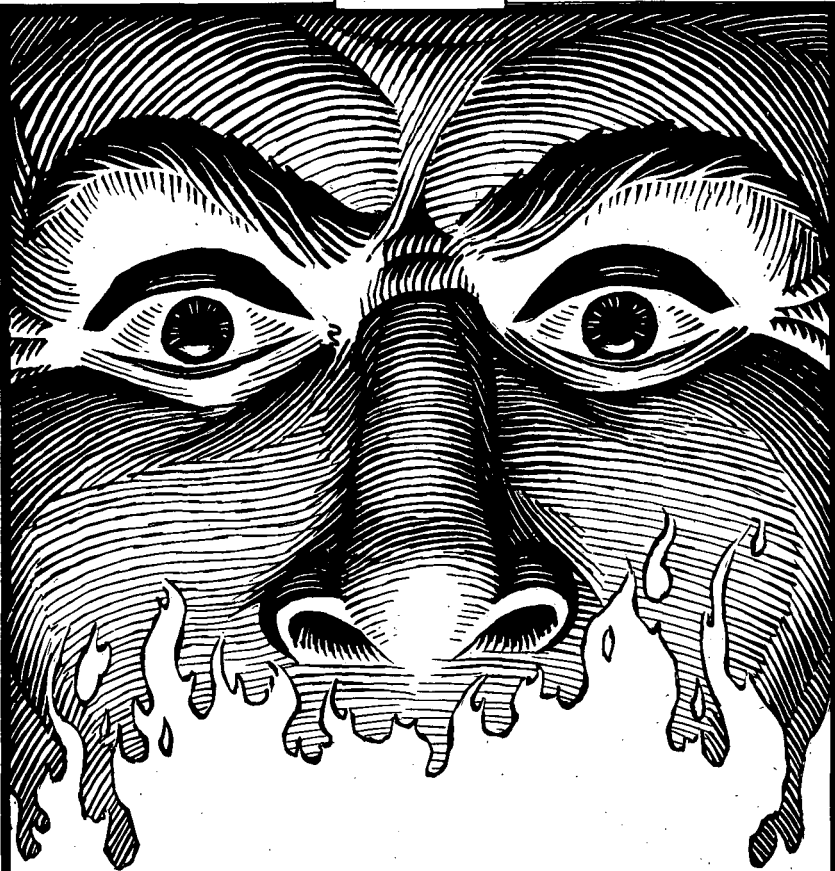
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FICTION



Too Hot

by Richard Taylor

KRO

Illustration by Dan Krovatin

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It was hot, too hot, and the urge to kill was back, stronger than ever before. The muscles in his big hands knotted with tension. His brain was fevered, longing for the soothing touch of soft flesh beneath his powerful fingers, the last rattle of breath from the restricted windpipe, the look of incomprehensible terror in the eyes of the chosen one as life slowly ebbed away in his loving, crushing grasp.

But it wasn't to be. Not tonight. They were waiting for him. Waiting everywhere. Patrolling the wide boulevards in their gleaming black and white cars, shining their lights down the dark alleys and deserted back streets, watching from the rooftops with their night goggles—crawling over the city like a plague of blue locusts.

But he was too smart for them, too smart by far. He'd stay inside, sealed in his tiny one room flat, and wait. Wait until they grew tired, wait until they grew complacent, wait until it was safe to venture forth again and *kill*.

But God, it was hot! What was Cominski thinking of? It never failed, either the idiot kept the building near freezing or somewhere above ninety. He was supposed to be a maintenance man, not a chef. Certainly it was cold outside, but

not cold enough to warrant this heat.

He walked to the room's single dirt-streaked window and gave it a mighty pull. The frame groaned, but the window never moved, its many layers of old paint acting like glue, holding it fast. He tried again and the cast-iron handle snapped off in his hand. He stared down at it for a second, then threw it across the room. It banged off the wall and landed on the worn carpet with a thud. Stupid. This wasn't the time to draw attention to himself. The killer's blood was in him tonight. He had to contain it, to control it, or he'd be caught. *Caught!* And that was unthinkable, something he could never let happen.

He sat down at the small cigarette-scarred table in the center of the room and pushed away a dish of rotting food. This morning's paper lay by his untouched napkin. **STRANGLER SILENT FOR SECOND WEEK** read the smallish headline below the fold. Time was they'd written about him in letters three inches tall. The reporter, whose name he'd come to know after all these weeks, had nothing new to offer, just a stale rehash of the first four murders and some claptrap from an "eminent" psychiatrist who said the killer had been

abused by his mother. What did the shrink know? Absolutely nothing: in truth, he'd never known his real mother, had been raised in one orphanage and foster home after another. How could he have been abused by someone he didn't even remember?

He wiped the sweat from the back of his neck. The room was an oven, the radiator against the wall pumping out heat like a blast furnace. His eyes strayed back to the paper, to the bold headline at the top of the page. **BODY SNATCHER STRIKES AGAIN: SEVENTH VICTIM DISAPPEARS.** "Body Snatcher." Where did they come up with these names? The story took up three columns, far more space than his. It was outrageous; there was no evidence that any of these seven people were even dead. For all anyone knew, they were all down in Florida on some sunny beach bagging some rays. He, on the other hand, had always been careful to leave his victims in a place guaranteed to cause a sensation. The woman in the front row of the movie theater had been the best, or maybe the cabbie sitting in his cab at the airport. This Body Snatcher person, whoever he was, simply made his victims disappear. Anyone could do that. The man had no class, no

finesse—couldn't the papers see that?

He tossed the paper away. When was this heat going to stop? He pushed back from the table, crossed the room, and yanked open the door. The hallway was empty, lit by dim bulbs that stretched off into the distance. The air was ripe with the fetid stench of garbage left in the heat too long. He hurried down the hall to the stairs and wound down the three flights to the basement. The steps ended at a steel door set into a dingy brick wall. He tried the knob, but it was locked.

"Cominski!" he yelled, pounding on the door, his fist hitting the steel with metallic booms that echoed up the stairwell. "Cominski, open up!"

He put his ear against the metal and listened. Footsteps rapped across concrete, then the lock clicked. He stepped back as the door swung open on silent hinges.

"Whaddya want?" growled Cominski from behind a fat cigar. He was short and squat, shaped like a fireplug, wearing green work pants and a stained, sleeveless T-shirt that might once have been white. What little hair he had seemed to grow mainly from his ears and nose. He glared out the door. "Speak up, whaddya want?"

"It's too hot in my apartment."

"Apartment?" Cominski snorted. "You ain't got no apartment, you got a room. One stinking room." Behind him a huge furnace, the grate door still half open, seem to fill the basement. A great network of asbestos-wrapped pipes spread from its top like some giant spiderweb. From behind the grate a roaring fire hissed and popped, casting long flickering shadows across the cracked concrete floor.

"Room or apartment, it's still too hot."

"That's your tough luck. I got no control over individual units—there's no separate thermostats. If I make you comfortable, the first floor bitches about being too cold. If they're just right, you're too hot. The only people in this dump that are happy live on the second floor, and their plumbing stinks."

He had a sudden urge to take the toadlike man's almost non-existent neck in his hands and squeeze the life out of him on the spot. He was certain Cominski wouldn't act this way if he knew he was talking to the Strangler. No, then the sneering contempt would quickly change to mind-numbing fear. It would be so easy. He was a little man, old, fat, out of

shape; he could finish him off quickly, enjoy the sight of his eyes bulging out in terror as the life was snuffed out of him with one quick twist of his neck.

Cominski must have seen the blood in his eyes. "What are you grinning at?" growled the maintenance man uncertainly as he stepped back from the doorway. "You got a problem, call your congressman."

He was only a few steps away; he could be on him in a flash. He started forward, then stopped. This wasn't a good idea—he'd read all about it at the library, careful never to check the books out in his name, only to look through them in the reference section. Serial killers never, *never* murdered people they knew. If Cominski was found dead, the police would start poking around the building—poking their noses into his business. He couldn't have that. No, better to leave Cominski alone, as much as he would have liked to throttle the little—

He turned and walked away.

"If you're hot, open your window," said Cominski's voice behind him. It was an irritating voice. A superior, snotty voice. *Wait a minute!* He stopped at the foot of the stairs, an idea forming: perhaps doing in the insolent maintenance man was

just what he needed to satisfy his all-consuming desire to kill *and* to throw the cops off. Hadn't he just said serial killers never murdered anyone they knew? Weren't the cops convinced that he, the Strangler, was a serial killer? They'd never suspect someone in the building—it was perfect.

He turned and walked back through the doorway. Cominski was nowhere in sight. He started to turn to look behind him when something hard smacked him a terrific wallop in the back of the head. He could still hear the metallic ring of the coal shovel against his skull as everything went black.

He woke flat on his back, tied down with clothesline to a long piece of plywood. The plywood

was slanted, resting on something; his head was elevated, his feet close to the floor. Somewhere behind him he could feel heat—intense heat. What was going on? Cominski walked up, wiping his hands on an oily rag, a grin spreading across his ugly face. "I'm glad you showed up," the maintenance man said in a strange voice. "All the cops nosing around were making things tough. You can scream if you want, nobody can hear you through the door."

He watched Cominski strain as he picked up the end of the plywood. Then he knew who the Body Snatcher was and where the bodies had all disappeared to. It was small satisfaction as he slid into the furnace.

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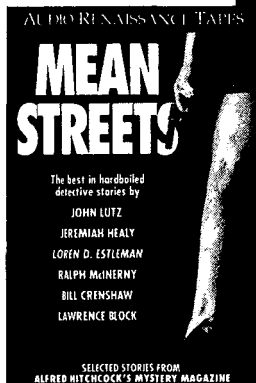
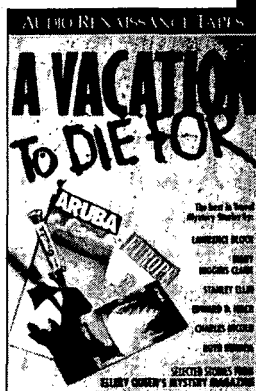
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FICTION

Murder Off— Blackstone Street—

by Robert P.
Jordan



Police Constable Ian McEwen buttoned the top button of his wool tunic. Standing in front of the long hall mirror, McEwen made sure his uniform was correct, then lifted his helmet from the table beside the mirror. With fingertips on either side, he settled the helmet squarely on his head and adjusted his chin strap. Though he could have checked, he knew that the short brim was parallel and the width of two fingers from his rather prominent nose. "Ian, you will be careful, won't you?" Ezme, his wife of twelve years, said that each morning before he headed out the door to Selby Street Station to report for duty. Having been a soldier in the Royal Horse Artillery for seven years, Ian had just begun his eighth year as a constable. Though he patrolled his territory on foot, he hoped soon to land a position as a horseman in the constabulary. The positions were prestigious, and openings were rare. He missed being around horses on a daily basis.

"Yes, dove," Ian replied, bending his six foot three inch frame stiffly at the waist to accept a peck on his cheek. Ezme was nearly a foot shorter than he. He could hear their three sons bickering at the breakfast table. His boots sounded along the hallway of their flat until he stood literally filling the doorway to the kitchen/dining room.

"Michael, James, Francis. Please be more decorous in your table conversations." This was said in a full voice. After a surreptitious glance to see that their mother was still down the hall, Ian followed the admonishment with a wink and a small smile that made the thin mustache below his Roman nose wrinkle upward. The boys, knowing their father was a strict but not a cold man, giggled. As Ian walked back down the hallway, he stopped to reciprocate his wife's kiss with one of his own. Then he left for work.

After standing to for inspection, Ian and his fellow constables readied themselves for duty by checking the bulletins of recent criminal activity in the station's territory as well as in the rest of London. Other than a homicide of a relative of the Earl of Kent, there was nothing of note. Some constables could walk to their posts from the station. Ian's post was at the southernmost region of Selby Street Station's area of responsibility, so he boarded a Scotland Yard bus and was driven out to it. He would be allowed two tea breaks and twenty minutes for a midday meal during his ten hour shift. And other than the rides to and from his post, he would be on his feet most of that time. The idea was to keep moving

but not too quickly. Ian tried to circulate through the whole of his post but not in any discernible pattern.

His job would also entail mediating local disputes between shopkeepers and customers or between family members. Ian would not tolerate child or wife beatings in his territory, unlike some constables he knew. He might also make initial investigations into crimes that were, for the most part, either petty larceny or vandalism. Sometimes there were personal assaults. He had intervened in a few in which his size had helped. But once a miscreant, before being subdued, had pulled a knife and cut off the last joint of Ian's right little finger. Another time a roundhouse left hook had caught Ian unawares, and the assailant's large ring had gashed the constable's cheek. Ian had worn that scar for nearly five years. And until this day, he had investigated nearly every manner of crime except murder.

Ian, hands clasped behind his back, sauntered slowly down an alleyway off Blackstone Street. Since it was a less than well-to-do neighborhood, the alley was not kept up, and gin drinkers were ensconced among the various piles of litter that never seemed to get cleared away. When Ian spied the legs of a man poking out from such a pile, he suspected a drunk sleeping it off. But as he went closer, he noted that the trousers appeared to be of good quality as did the man's rather delicate black shoes. Squatting on his heels, Ian reached into the pile of newspapers, metal cans, and sundry other rubbish to where the head should be located. He found it, and he brought his hand away with a stickiness on his fingertips. It was blood, thick and congealing. Fighting back revulsion, Ian parted the trash only as much as was needed to look at the man's face. He was obviously dead, but Ian nonetheless felt for a pulse at the carotid artery. There was none. Trying not to disturb anything else, he stood and backed up several steps before turning and striding rapidly out to Blackstone Street where a call box was located.

Inspector Michael Berglin was sent on the call to Blackstone Street, where he was met and briefed by a sergeant of the constables. The sergeant read from his notes and stated that no identification was found on the body. Berglin watched as a line of constables, elbow to elbow, walked from the other end of the alley toward them. All were bent at the waist except for one rather large consta-

ble, who stood erect. Berglin could tell that the tall, mustachioed bobby was using his eyes but retaining some dignity. Several of the other men resorted to holding their helmets on with their hands. The chin straps did not help when the bobbies bent forward.

"Who found the body?" Inspector Berglin asked.

"Sir? Oh, Constable McEwen. He's the tall chap," the sergeant responded with a perfunctory gesture toward the line of constables.

"Ah," the inspector replied mildly. "Could you please ask Constable McEwen to report to me after you have completed your . . . your sweep through the alley?"

"Certainly, sir." The sergeant nodded as his gesture of deference instead of making a hand salute. It was a slight Berglin noted but ignored.

Other junior grade inspectors had cleared the rubbish, piece by piece, from the body. Each crumpled newspaper, each rusted can, each broken piece of glass was catalogued and inspected for clues. The dead man, his body now covered with a brown tarpaulin, sat propped against the wall where McEwen had found him. Berglin knelt on the edge of the tarp and pulled it slowly away from the body.

The man wore a dinner jacket. The collar of his shirt was torn loose from its buttoned stays, the tie was in disarray. A blow to the right side of the victim's head, just behind the temple, was not disfiguring, but it had bled some. It was probably not the cause of death. Lifting aside the lapels of the dinner jacket, Berglin found a blood-encrusted shirt. At the top edge of the stain was a hole that was too small to be a bullet wound. "Ice pick, receipt spindle, or bayonet, perhaps," mumbled the inspector. He had seen spike-like bayonet wounds in the Great War, but the holes had been much larger. It was death by stabbing, but from what? The technicians and doctors at the Yard would have to help with this one.

Berglin had heard a man's footsteps come up behind as he had knelt before the body, but he had concentrated on his thoughts. A commanding voice eventually broke through them. "Sir. Sergeant Maitlin requested that I report to you, sir." The "sir" was pronounced "sah," as often happened in the military no matter from which district of England the soldier came. Berglin stood up and found himself a good six inches shorter than the constable standing at attention. The helmet added to the man's imposing height.

"At ease, Constable McEwen," Berglin said.

"Sir."

"Well, Constable McEwen, what do you make of all this?"

"Sir?"

"I need to reason this out, and I do that best if I have someone as a sounding board, so to speak. So go to it, man. What do you see, and what conclusions have you drawn?"

McEwen glanced about for a moment. His mustache twitched. It was a new experience for a constable to be treated as an intelligent being. "Well, sir, we have before us a gentleman near fifty years of age. His clothes tell us he is probably of the peerage or still in the officer corps of the military. You see, sir, the mohair striping on the dinner trousers and the decoration ribbon sewn to the lapel of the jacket. It is the D.S.C. As you no doubt have surmised, he was struck down but killed by a puncture wound near the sternum. He was not killed here because of the lack of a bloodstain beneath him or pooled on his lap. He was probably married, lately divorced or widowed, because of the indentation at the base of the left ring finger indicating a ring, probably a wedding ring, of long standing. It is now gone, as is his wallet. Possibly this is robbery or an attempt to make the police think it is robbery. He wore spectacles most, if not all, of the time as evidenced by the indentations on his nose. As you can see, there are some small lacerations about his right eye as if that lens had been broken when he was struck on the head. We found no spectacles or broken lenses in the alley, so they might be at the location of the killing. Without a closer inspection, sir, I would only be guessing at other facts. I was able to see this much over the shoulders of the junior inspectors when they cleared the rubbish away from the body."

"That was excellent, McEwen!" Berglin burst out after a moment of astounded silence.

"Sir." Only the slightest upturning of the constable's mouth showed his response to the compliment.

"Sergeant Maitlin!" shouted Inspector Berglin. The sergeant walked over as fast as he dared and yet retain his dignity in front of the other bobbies.

"Yes, inspector." He again nodded instead of saluting.

"Sergeant, I must have Constable McEwen accompany me back to the Yard." Turning to McEwen, he asked, "When are you finished with your shift?"

The sergeant replied, "Five o'clock, inspector."

Inspector Berglin frowned at the sergeant and turned his attention back to the tall constable, who had fished out a pocket watch.

The inspector raised his eyebrows to indicate he wanted McEwen to answer.

"In about six hours, sir," McEwen answered tactfully so that he did not mimic the sergeant's answer. It saved his immediate superior some face. The atmosphere between Berglin and Maitlin was becoming tense, and McEwen sought to defuse it as best he could.

"Come along, then, McEwen. Sergeant, you will, of course, have someone else take up his post for the remainder of his shift." Without waiting for another nod from the sergeant, the inspector turned on his heel and strode off toward the Scotland Yard car which had brought him to the crime scene. Falling in behind and in step with the inspector, McEwen felt as if he were back in the Royal Horse Artillery on dismounted parade.

For an hour after entering the Yard, a place to which Ian was rarely required to go, the tall constable followed Inspector Berglin around as he checked on other matters. Often the constable was left to stand outside office doors while the inspector made various inquiries. It was dull and routine work. McEwen wished he were back at his post if he and Berglin were not going to actively investigate the murder. Finally they entered Berglin's own office, which he shared with two other inspectors who were not presently there. The inspector sat behind his desk and indicated that McEwen should sit in the chair near the door.

"Well, constable, you have been quite patient with me so far. What time is it?"

McEwen reached to extricate his pocket watch but noticed a clock on the wall behind the inspector. "Half-past twelve, sir."

"Ah, no wonder I am feeling famished. Would you care to be my guest at the Surrey Club down the street?"

McEwen was aghast but tried not to show it. It was an exclusive club for the peerage or field grade officers in His Majesty's Service. Ian had not reckoned on Inspector Berglin's being one of the former.

"My treat," Berglin added with a smile, "as my American acquaintances would say."

"Yes, sir. I would be honored, your lordship."

"Ah, we are at work. You may ignore any titles I may have. Since the Great War, 'inspector' is as formal a title as I require of anyone."

"Sir."

The men left the Yard and walked quickly down the street. The inspector wore an unbuttoned overcoat on that brisk October afternoon. McEwen would not don his wool uniform cape until colder weather prevailed. Entering the Surrey Club, they were met by a doorman who took their hats and Berglin's coat. The maitre d', who addressed Berglin as "Sir Michael," led them down the hall to a private dining room paneled in dark oak. A waiter appeared and stood by.

"Ah, McEwen, what do you think of all this?"

"Quite beyond me, sir."

"What would you like?"

Ian shrugged slightly and replied, "I defer to your experience, sir."

Berglin ordered for them both and settled back in his chair. "You have obviously been in His Majesty's Service."

McEwen sat upright. "Yes, sir. Royal Horse Artillery. Our battery was attached to the Argyle and Sutherland when the armistice was signed. I served out my seven year enlistment and then entered the constabulary."

"Yes, I took a quick look at your record at Administration whilst we were there. Quite good."

"Thank you, sir."

"But your speech and demeanor indicate to me someone of higher education than a common constable. You are well read?"

McEwen was puzzled as well as annoyed at Berglin's use of the term "common." What did this inspector, whom he had never before seen, want with Ian McEwen? "I'm passably well read for a man who never finished the final form, sir." There was a moment of silence, then McEwen uncharacteristically spoke up.

"Sir? May I be blunt and ask a question?"

Berglin smiled broadly. "By all means, do."

"Why am I here, sir?"

"Ah, yes. This is a bit of unusual treatment for you. Well, let me say that I was baffled by this case at first. I had no direction in it. Over the last fifteen years of police work, I've been stumped once in a while by even the simplest of crimes. Your assessment of the victim gave me a bit of inspiration. Your powers of observation seem to complement mine, and I believe we together may bring this case, and perhaps another one, to a conclusion in a hurry."

"Sir, might I inquire if this other case is the murder of Sir Roger Bently?" Roger Bently was the relative of the Earl of Kent McEwen

had read about in the Selby Street Station's daily crime bulletin.

"By Jove, McEwen! You astound me even more!"

For the first time Ian smiled openly. "Well, sir, if my summation is correct concerning the gentleman in the alley, the murder of two members of the peerage so close together in time would be odd if they were not connected."

"That also was my thought when you first gave me your ideas on the matter at Blackstone Street. Now, after we finish here, we will descend upon the site of the other murder and see if you can observe something I have missed." As if on cue, the waiter appeared with their meals.

Three days passed, and Ian McEwen continued to act as foil, devil's advocate, and batboy for Inspector Berglin. On the fourth day, a Friday, at breakfast, Ian sat pondering over the dual murders of Sirs Roger Bently and Maxwell Higgins. Higgins, it had turned out, was the victim in the alley. He was, as Ian had surmised, recently widowed, a nobleman, and a retired lieutenant colonel late of the White Horse Guards. The murder scene of Sir Roger Bently, this time a shooting, was in the victim's study. He had lived alone in a two story flat not far from where Sir Maxwell lived. Because no revelations came to Berglin or Ian during their visit to the flat, the investigation reverted back to normal police work. There would be no shortcuts. The two men spent many hours together poring over the two murdered men's lives, looking for connections or clues. Late the previous afternoon, Ian had finally found one from the information they had been able to compile. The two men both belonged to the Chesterton Club. If possible, it was even more exclusive than the Surrey Club, in which Ian and the inspector had so far taken three noon meals.

"A ha'penny for your thoughts," Ezme said, interrupting Ian's cogitation.

"A high price to pay for what I'm thinking," he replied, putting his long arm around her still-trim waist. He had not donned his tunic yet, and his arms were bare beyond the short sleeves of his undershirt. Ezme bent and kissed the top of his head. "This murder case is a stumper, love. I'd like to get it behind me and get back to my post. I sort of miss the contact with normal people."

"Not like hobnobbing with the peerage; eh?" she asked playfully.

"Oh, Inspector Berglin is an all right chap," Ian said, taking up his mug of coffee. He had learned to like coffee for breakfast after

being introduced to it by American soldiers he had met just before the armistice was signed. "But he seems to go in for the exotic explanation of things, and I for the plain."

"So he hears hoofbeats and thinks of zebras, eh?" she responded, moving back to her stove. These moments at the breakfast table were sometimes their only ones alone until night.

"Aye, love. I suppose we balance each other out."

"Well, dovey," she replied, "I believe your plain ideas will solve the case sooner than some knight's fancy ones."

"Just so it's solved, love. Just so it's solved."

The Chesterton Club was the policemen's first stop after meeting at Scotland Yard. The club was on the north side of Grave's End Heath, so it had grounds for extensive gardens, lawn tennis courts, and stables. The latter drew Ian's attention, but before finding some excuse to "investigate" that edifice, he accompanied Berglin to interview the club's director, Major Donald McMichael, who was retired from His Majesty's Service.

After introductions were exchanged, the policemen took seats on the opposite sides of a huge oak desk over which Major McMichael, short in stature, peered at them as they conversed. The major appeared nervous. Berglin carried on the interview at first and let Ian take notes in a small leather-bound notebook that was rapidly being filled with bits of the two dead men's lives. And those bits were, so far, leading them no closer to a successful conclusion. When Berglin and McMichael were at last quiet, and it appeared that the inspector had run out of questions, Ian spoke up.

"Sir, if I may?"

"Certainly, constable," Berglin responded.

"Major McMichael, I, as you might have surmised, am not familiar with clubs such as the Chesterton," to which the retired officer nodded knowingly. "How is it governed? What I mean to ask, sir, is it run by . . . committees?"

"You mean our activities? Oh, yes, constable."

"Would Sir Roger and Sir Maxwell have been on the same committees?"

"Why, yes, I believe they were. Let me pull their activity files, and we shall see." McMichael popped up and left the room for a moment as if leaving the room were a relief. The policemen did not speak in his absence. McMichael reappeared soon with two cards on which the dead men's committee work was outlined. He

handed them to Ian, then took his seat. Ian compared the two cards and noted that they served on two committees together. One made Ian smile—the Stable Committee. The other was the Library Committee. He quickly handed the cards to Inspector Berglin. As the inspector studied the cards, Ian asked as tactfully as he could, “Sir, in the interest of solving these terrible crimes . . .”

“Oh, most dreadful,” the club manager intoned quickly.

“Yes, sir. They are most dreadful. In an effort to solve them, would it be permissible to talk with the hired help of, let us say, the stable and the library?” Ian noted that his superior nodded in agreement.

“By all means. Anything that would help. Willie Vine is our stableboy. He is an ex-jockey for whom one of our club members vouched. He should be in the stables or nearby. As for Mortimer Nash, our librarian, I’m afraid he doesn’t come in to work until one o’clock. Several members like to ride in the morning, but demand for the library is normally nonexistent until well after noon.”

Inspector Berglin rose, and Ian followed suit. After goodbyes, the policemen left the office. In the foyer, a doorman returned their hats and Berglin’s coat. Standing outside the front door, Berglin asked, “So what is running through your mind, Constable McEwen?”

“Well, sir,” Ian began while adjusting his helmet’s chin strap; “what is in my mind might be a bit blunt for . . . for a person who is used to places such as this.”

“Meaning me?”

“Well . . . yes, sir.”

Inspector Berglin drew back his head and laughed heartily. Ian turned and saw the doorman peering out at them from the small window of the door. “Oh, McEwen, you are rich! What are your views, man? I promise not to be upset.”

They began their trek toward the stables. “Well, sir, it seems to this uniformed policeman that we have searched for connections between the two men, and the only substantial ones are to be found here. Now we are supposed to interview two men, commoners both, who are out of their element with the membership of the Chesteron Club. If I might suggest something, sir—I believe, if there is some clue to be found by speaking to these men, that another commoner by himself might be the best interviewer.”

“Meaning yourself? Even in uniform?”

“Yes, sir.”

Inspector Berglin stopped just outside the open doors of the stable. The odors of the barn, hay, and horses filled Ian's nostrils and made his heart ache to be with horses again. Berglin took a deep breath and exhaled forcefully. "Right, McEwen. I'm going to go back to the Yard. I do have other cases. But I will want a full report when you return." Ian saluted the inspector, who nodded in return and, with a laugh, moved back to the car that waited at the front door to the club.

"Hallo! Anybody here?" Ian entered the dark interior of the stable and moved along the aisle of the building. Horses' heads appeared at several stalls along the center corridor. He reached out and softly touched each one as he passed along the way to the rear of the building. There he found a wiry man of about fifty who seemed half his size in both height and weight. "Willie Vine, is it?" he asked as the man reluctantly returned his greeting. He noted the small sheath knife on the man's belt. It was not an unusual accoutrement for a horseman.

"Aye, constable."

"I'm here with Inspector Michael Berglin looking into that sticky mess with Sir Maxwell Higgins and Sir Roger Bently. I was told to come back and talk with you, seeing as they both rode . . ."

"Oh, no, constable. Only Sir Roger rode, and a good horseman he was, too. His gelding is down the way, three stalls on the left. Sir Maxwell used to ride but had quit before I started to work here. It is rumored," Vine said, lowering his voice as if to hide his opinion even from the horses present, "that he disliked horses and only rode because it was . . . expected."

"Ah, yes," Ian said noncommittally. He slipped the chin strap and doffed his helmet. "Do you mind?" he asked, indicating a seat nearby on a hay bale. Unbuttoning his top tunic button, he made himself comfortable, which also put the stableman at ease.

Three hours later, the constable had gleaned as much gossip from the ex-jockey as he could and had shared his horsemanship background with him. He helped groom out several horses, one of which had been Sir Roger's. It was as enjoyable a three hours as Ian had spent in many years. He was able to swap stories with another horseman and lay hands on some of the beasts he missed so much. Before leaving the stable, he shook hands with the stableman and then made his way back to the Club. As he approached

the building, he noted a large, rotund man with spectacles peering out at him from a side window.

After regaining admittance from the doorman, he was shown to the library, where Mortimer Nash was supposed to be in attendance for the day. It was just after one o'clock, and the doorman had answered in the affirmative when Ian inquired whether Nash had reported for work. With a perfunctory knock, the doorman showed him into the library. Ian stopped, startled. The man who had been watching him from the window stood facing him. He was as tall as Ian and probably weighed two stone more than the constable. But it was a corpulent two stone. Balding and fortyish, the man had droopy eyelids with a pencil-thin mustache. His suit was modest yet well-tailored and looked quite new. Hoping he did not reveal his amazement at the size of the librarian, Ian noted the active, washed out blue eyes beneath the drooping lids. They appeared to be those of an adroit, perhaps even cruel, man and belied the ponderous, bulbous body which contained them.

Ian began his questioning in a roundabout way. He moved about the room looking at the collection of books as he interviewed Nash. Most of the answers he knew from his conversations with Willie Vine. And for the most part, Nash's answers matched Vine's. But when he asked the librarian about his personal relations with the dead men, Nash's eyes narrowed even more than normal, and a thin smile appeared beneath the mustache. It was out of character with the man, who so far had been monosyllabic in his rejoinders.

"Oh, constable. We got along quite well." His voice was a bit more intense and louder than his, so far, soft monotone. The librarian, who had not moved more than a step or two since the interview began, turned his back and limped off toward the circulation desk at the rear of the room. Ian followed.

"Have you injured yourself lately?" Ian asked. He would not usually have asked such a rude question, but the man had piqued his interest.

"Not lately. I was wounded and invalided out of the White Horse Guards just before the armistice."

"That was Sir Maxwell's regiment, was it not?" Ian asked, trying to keep the excitement out of his voice.

"I believe so, constable, yes."

"Did you know Sir Maxwell then?"

"I knew of him, yes. But we did not cross paths . . . often." The smile reappeared for a moment.

Ian moved over to a dark wood cabinet with twelve small drawers. He slipped a finger through a ring attached to the front of the drawer and pulled. Inside the drawer were hundreds of cream-colored three by five cards held by a long steel rod. Though he had never seen one before, Ian knew it was a card catalogue. A small metal plate attached to the cabinet stated that it was made by Silverstein Bros., Chicago. Most libraries in Great Britain, or at least the ones Ian had used, had looseleaf or printed book catalogues. Ian noted that Nash limped hurriedly over to stand next to the policeman. Ian's chin rested on his tunic collar as he fingered through the drawer, but his sideways glance took in a sheen of perspiration on the librarian's face. Ian had often seen a guilty look on a shopkeeper found shorting a customer; Mortimer Nash had that same look. Ian decided not to press the issue, but he knew he would soon be returning to the Chesterton Club's library. With a "thank you for your assistance," he shook hands with Nash and left. The librarian's hand was clammy from perspiration.

Before making his way back to the Yard, Ian stopped again at the stable. "Not left yet, Ian?" Willie asked.

"No. Something has me stumped, you see. The White Horse Guards, do you know about them?"

"Sure. Cavalry, but in the Great War, they were dismounted for the most part. Acted like light infantry, really. It was the regiment of Sir Maxwell, Sir Roger, Major McMichael, and Mortimer Nash, if I remember correctly." The old ex-jockey chuckled. "I'll lay five to one that Mortimer wasn't so tubby back then, but he'd ne'er made a horseman unless it was on a Shire. But they was takin' anyone with any college and makin' 'em officers, you see."

"An officer, do you say? Nash?"

"Aye. A lieutenant. I daresay the regiment was not ashamed of him if the gossip I heard is correct, no matter what he may look like. He was invalidated out just before the end."

"And McMichael. Are you sure he also served with the Guards?"

"Yes. Behind his desk you'll likely find many a keepsake on the wall from his days as a cavalryman. Whether or no' he was a good officer, I've ne'er heard."

Berglin indeed had other cases and, lacking time to join the constable, told Ian to follow through in his investigation of the new connection found between Nash and McMichael. Berglin was all for chalking it down to coincidence, but Ian had other ideas. As

he explained to Berglin, who eventually concurred, ex-servicemen rarely came into day-to-day contact with other ex-members of their regiments after leaving His Majesty's Service. Two men from the same regiment with ties to the same exclusive club in Grave's End might be coincidence. But in this case there were four, and two of them had been murdered.

As with many units with a long and distinguished record in the service of the Realm, there was an official historian/activist for the White Horse Guards, who, in this case, was sequestered in a small, dimly lit office at the British Museum. After ringing him up, Ian traveled to visit Captain Howard Mason, late of the Guards.

It was late in the day when he again made contact with Inspector Berglin. Over the telephone, he made two requests of the inspector. One was that Berglin bring two more constables with him to the Chesterton Club at eleven o'clock the next morning. The other request was for search warrants for the library and Major McMichael's office at the club. With characteristic aplomb, the constable warded off Berglin's queries over his findings. Berglin spent an untypically restless night awaiting his rendezvous with Constable McEwen.

Inspector Berglin could not wait for the appointed hour, so when the warrants were obtained, he secured the services of two robust constables and drove over to the Chesterton Club. Upon his arrival, he inquired the tall constable's whereabouts from the doorman, who directed the inspector to the stables. Leaving the two constables at the front door with orders to tell him if either McMichael or Nash arrived or left the club, Berglin walked out to the stables. And there he found Constable Ian McEwen astride Sir Roger Bently's gelding, Tomalin.

Berglin moved over to where Willie Vine leaned against the fence that enclosed the equitation arena. Exchanging nods, the two men stood and watched the tall policeman, who looked even more imposing on the gelding, make the horse go through its paces. The constable sat erect as he had been taught in the service. With the barest of cues, the animal changed gaits and leads as Ian rode him in large ovals and figure eights. To Berglin, it was a stunning display, and when he voiced his opinion to the ex-jockey, the diminutive man replied, "Aye, gov'nor. He and ol' Tom there hit it off right away. I could see that. When Ian came out to see me this morning, I asked him to give Tom a good run. They've already had

a bit of a gallop, and now Ian's givin' 'im some needed schoolin'. Since Sir Roger was killed, the horse has been fairly neglected. Ian's done me and ol' Tom a favor, you might say."

In his total concentration on the task at hand, Ian had not seen Inspector Berglin's arrival. Slowing the gelding to a walk, he headed the animal toward Vine and his superior. Stopping the horse a few feet away from them, Ian brought his hand up smartly to salute Berglin.

"By Jove, that was quite a show, McEwen!" the inspector burst out.

"Yes, sir. It felt good to mount up again, though I'm more than a bit rusty."

"You'd never know it," Vine replied, taking hold of the bridle as Ian dismounted. The men pulled the irons up to the top of the leathers. "I'll walk 'im down for you. Any time you want to give Tom a bit of exercise, come back. I'm sure Major McMichael won't mind until Sir Roger's estate is settled."

At the mention of those men, Ian's face clouded over. After Ian's last affectionate pat on the gelding's neck, Willie led the animal away. The two policemen started back toward the Club.

"Are you ready to explain why we are back here, and why the two warrants?" Berglin asked.

"Sir, if I find the evidence I believe to be in the library, I may be able at least to establish a sequence of events that may bring the case to a conclusion. If we are very fortunate, sir, we may obtain a confession from Major McMichael as to his part."

"His part in what?" Berglin queried.

"Murder, sir."

The library was their first stop after showing McMichael the search warrant. Both men saw the ex-cavalryman's face blanch when he was served with the authorization to search the library. The warrant for McMichael's office was held in abeyance at Ian's request. It being only a few minutes past eleven, Mortimer Nash was not there.

For ten minutes Ian fiddled with the card catalogue cabinet. He unscrewed the rods that held the cards and, one by one, pulled them out and walked over to the window where he used the sunlight to inspect them. The eighth one drew a smile from the constable. As each rod was inspected, Major McMichael, who had been asked to stay in the room with the policemen, grew more agitated and

unwilling to meet either of the other men's eyes. Ian moved to the inspector and held up the eighth rod, his left index finger on the sharp end.

"Sir," Ian began in a low tone, "please look at the small bushing that holds the rod's screw onto the rod. When I pick at it with my fingernail, what do you see?"

"Brown specks. Good Lord, is that dried blood?"

"I believe so, sir, yes. Of course, we'll need to have the men at the laboratory verify whether it matches Sir Maxwell's blood type. His, if my memory serves me, was O-positive. Mortimer Nash's, if he says that he handled the drawer and cut himself on the bushing, is A-negative. I saw it in his service record at the British Museum yesterday. This, sir, is the murder weapon, strange as it may seem. Card catalogues such as this one are common in America, where this was made. The rod would be difficult to replace here in England. You see, sir, Mortimer couldn't have thrown it away because its absence would be noticed. His fingerprints will be all over it, and that would prove nothing. He works here. Now, if you'll give me another quarter hour, I believe I can find more evidence that the murder took place here."

Berglin nodded his assent, whereupon Ian went to his hands and knees and began to search the edges of the rugs and along the cracks in the wooden floor. Berglin watched as Ian took out a folding knife and an envelope and proceeded to collect bits of something from the floor. At last Ian rose and showed Inspector Berglin what was inside the envelope. Tiny slivers of glass lay in the crease at the bottom.

"Sir Maxwell's spectacles?" the inspector asked in a whisper.

"I believe so, sir. The laboratory chaps may be able to tell if this is optician's grade or the remnants of a whisky tumbler smashed upon the floor. I believe it is the former."

"But this is all circumstantial, McEwen. We couldn't prove what went on, even though we might know it did," whispered the inspector.

"Yes sir. But Major McMichael is getting quite unraveled, as you can see," Ian said with a nod in the club manager's direction. "If I peck away at him for a few minutes, I do believe he will come undone. Please have the other two constables come in and stand on either side of the door, sir."

When the two policemen were in position, Ian turned toward the retired cavalryman. "Aye, sir, then it was blackmail!" boomed Ian.

His voice broke the nearly tangible silence in the room. It also broke the club manager's nerve. His knees buckled, and he sat unceremoniously on the floor by the window. McMichael's hands went to his face. Even when the two constables helped him up and sat him in a chair, the major's hands remained clasped to his face.

"Please, sir," Ian said, "buck up a bit. Act like an officer late of the White Horse Guards." He spoke this low enough that only the retired officer could hear it. His voice was neither derisive nor condescending. "It will, of course, go much easier if you tell us the truth, sir." McMichael lowered his hands and sat upright.

"I didn't do it, you must believe me!" The major's eyes seemed to protrude from his face, which was distorted with emotion. The breakdown was more complete than Ian had hoped for.

"Then it was Nash?" Berglin asked hurriedly before McMichael regained his composure.

"Yes, yes. It should all come out."

"Before, you go any further, Major McMichael, I must remind you that anything you say may be used in any court proceedings in which you may be involved," Berglin said. "Please, take notes, constable."

Ian pulled out his notebook and a pencil. As he looked up, he noted the briefest sparkle of light at the library door. A rustling noise that receded down the hall betrayed the presence of an eavesdropper. The light, Ian reasoned quickly, had been reflected off spectacles, and the eavesdropper would most likely be Mortimer Nash.

"Sir, it's Nash!" Ian shouted to the inspector. "Come on, you two!" he commanded as he gestured to the two other constables. "We'll run him down." Ian knew Berglin would stay with McMichael.

An open door that led out into the extensive gardens of the Chesterton Club gave away Nash's exit. The three unarmed constables stopped just outside the door and looked about. Afraid that the librarian might perhaps be waiting for them in ambush, Ian cautioned the other men, "He might have a weapon of some sort, most likely a hand gun." He motioned to the two men to circle to the left while he slowly went around the gardens to the right. So intent was he in his inspection of the autumn-colored hedges and dirt-mounded roses that he nearly did not see the corpulent figure of the librarian running straight across the heath where earlier Ian had galloped Tomalin. The distance the huge man had covered

in a short time amazed Ian. "This way, fellows!" Nash's limp made him run in a peculiar stiff-legged gait, but it did not appear to slow him down. Ian opened the top button of his tunic as he started off. He could hear the footsteps of the other constables, but he worried only whether he would have enough speed and endurance to run his culprit to earth. His last footrace across the heath was as a schoolboy, but he was confident that he was fitter than the librarian, if not faster over a short distance. As the chase grew longer, Ian began to note that the distance between him and Nash was narrowing. But the densely wooded park at the edge of the heath was drawing closer, and even a body the size of Nash's could easily hide among the brambles and underbrush. By the time enough men were raised to search the wood, Nash might be able to make his escape. Ian bore down and ran as fast as he could. Within seconds, though, Ian could tell with a sinking feeling that he would not overtake the librarian in time to catch him this side of the wood.

The thunder of hooves interrupted Ian's thoughts. Turning a bit as he ran, Ian looked over his shoulder and caught sight of the other two constables shuffling along well behind him. To his right, on a converging vector, came Willie Vine mounted on Tomalin. The stirrups were too long for the ex-jockey, so it was probably the same saddle Ian himself had used. But by standing in the stirrups, a not-uncommon stance for jockeys, Willie was able to keep his seat on the gelding. "I'll get 'im, Ian!" Willie yelled as he galloped past. The difference in running speed between man and horse was never so evident to Ian than then. Tomalin made up the distance in seconds. Willie circled Nash and turned the gelding into the frantically running librarian. The collision between sixteen stone man and eighty-five stone animal could be heard by the constables trailing the chase. Ian dropped to a jog when he saw that Nash did not stir after being knocked to the turf. He did not care if Mortimer Nash ever rose again.

Nash, who had only been rendered unconscious by his run-in with the gelding, and Major McMichael were arrested and later arraigned. Nash was charged with murder on the weight of the statements McMichael made to the police. A lesser charge would be brought against the Chesterton Club's manager.

Three days passed, and Inspector Berglin invited Ian and Ezme McEwen to dinner at a posh restaurant. Though Ian had written

his report and gone back to his usual post, much to the relief of Sergeant Maitlin, who had been forced to walk Ian's patrol more than once while the tall constable was assisting Berglin, the inspector still was not clear about all of Ian's methods.

"You see, sir," Ian continued after sipping a bit of after-dinner port, "I felt I had to dig up as much information as I could on the four men's common bonds. That turned out to be the Chesterton Club and, previous to that, the White Horse Guards. Willie Vine was a fountain of information about the comings and goings at the Chesterton. It was from him that I learned of the rather confusing relationships among Nash, McMichael, and Sir Maxwell. Though Nash's deportment with other club members was always proper, he sometimes was a bit peckish with McMichael and Sir Maxwell. He would often tell them where to get off, to borrow an American phrase. That indicated that he had some hold over them. When I visited with Captain Mason at the British Museum, I discovered that he was a retired officer who had risen through the ranks of the White Horse Guards. That in itself is a bit unusual because one rarely finds that a man advances from private soldier to officer and remains in the same regiment. But it gave Captain Mason a wonderful advantage, having seen the machinations from both sides of the regimental camp, so to speak. He had personal knowledge of both McMichael and Sir Maxwell, and neither was, in his eyes, a glowing model for His Majesty's Service. It was, in fact, a blunder by Sir Maxwell that caused Lieutenant Mortimer Nash's troop to come under fire from British guns and led to his wounding. Major McMichael, who took Nash's statement in hospital, helped to cover up the episode whilst assuring Lieutenant Nash that things would be put right for his men who had been wounded. It was only well after the war, at his job as a librarian at Caius College, that Nash discovered that Sir Maxwell had not been punished in any way for his grievous mistake. He had, in fact, been somehow awarded the D.S.C. for his wartime service. Nash, embittered and resentful, decided to have his pound of flesh by blackmailing Sir Maxwell after gaining his position from McMichael as librarian at the Chesterton Club. McMichael, as you have seen, inspector, can be quite pliable when pressure is applied, a trait explained to me also by Captain Mason."

Ian sat back in his chair. "I conjectured that, whilst in the club's library, Sir Maxwell grew incensed at Nash, probably upon his asking for an increase in the blackmail payment, and threatened

to turn him in. Nash killed him by plunging a card catalogue tray rod through his chest after rendering him unconscious from a blow to the head as Sir Maxwell attempted to leave the library. Nash, though crippled from his war wound, was strong enough to move the body to where I found it off Blackstone Street. There are bloodstains in Nash's auto."

"And what about Sir Roger? Why was he killed?" Ezme asked her husband.

"I believe Mortimer had no untoward animosity for Sir Roger. Sir Roger had a good war record and appeared to be a true gentleman. But as we found out from McMichael, Sir Maxwell had informed Sir Roger of the existence of the blackmail agreement with Nash. Sir Roger had, characteristically, counselled Sir Maxwell to turn Mortimer in to authorities. But he did not do so himself because, I believe, he probably felt he must respect the wishes of a brother officer, whatever the consequences. We'll never know whether Sir Maxwell actually told Sir Roger that it was Nash who had been blackmailing him. Nash himself didn't know. But after he had killed Sir Maxwell, he had to assume Sir Roger knew and would point him out as soon as the body was found. After dumping the body off Blackstone Street, Mortimer journeyed to Sir Roger's flat, where he shot and killed him to cover his trail. This act was, above all the others, the most hideous part of the whole affair. Mortimer spared McMichael because he reasoned he could keep McMichael under his control. It was," Ian added, "an unfortunate decision for Sir Maxwell that he did not come to us instead of trying to make Mortimer Nash retreat from his greedy requests. For all his faults, and he has many, Mortimer does not lack for physical courage. Captain Mason had recorded in the archives of the Guards several instances of Nash's bravery in battle even in the time that he was at the front. Ah," Ian mused, "if only such bravery could have been directed in some other pursuit."

"Now, constable, I have a proposition for you," said Berglin. "What would you say, as a reward for your magnificent investigation and solving of these crimes, to being promoted to junior inspector? No more uniform or walking your post in all sorts of inclement weather. And more brass for your pocket, as they say."

Ian glanced about for a moment. His mustache twitched. "Well, sir, I don't know what to say." He looked at Ezme. "Well, old girl, what do *you* say?"

"It's a wonderful opportunity, Ian. But you've had your heart set

on becoming a mounted constable. You are high on the waiting list."

"Yes, that was always my goal, inspector. If I gained that position, I would be happy until retirement."

"Yes, well, I noticed your affinity for horseflesh at the Chesterton Club." Berglin touched his napkin almost daintily to his lips. "I hope you won't feel upset if I tell you I have anticipated your hesitancy. I know about your desire to become a mounted constable from reading your personnel record. I have, however, spoken to the directors of the Chesterton Club. And, contrary to what you might think, they are more pleased than embarrassed to be rid of these 'cancerous elements,' as one of them said to me. I rightly played up your part in the investigation, and they are quite willing to let you, and any of your family, come out any time to the stables and help Willie Vine exercise the horses. Tomalin, Sir Roger's horse, was bought by the club, and he will need a bit of exercise every so often." Berglin looked over to Ezme and Ian with expectant eyes. "Well, what do you say?"

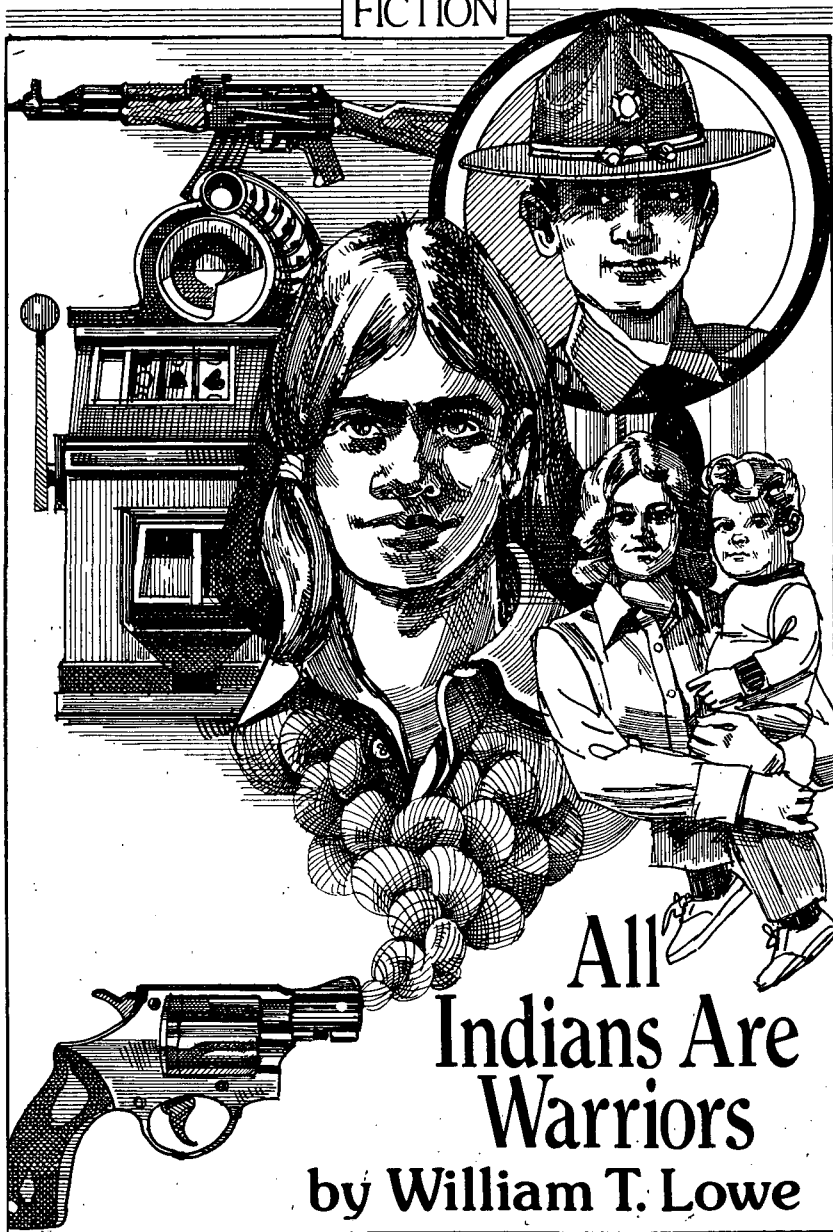
"Sir, if you feel I would be of better use to the Yard as an inspector . . ."

"You most certainly will," Berglin interjected.

"Then I must accept," Ian said with a laugh.

"The paperwork may take a while, considering the ranks you will be passing over, but I want to be the first to congratulate you, Inspector McEwen." The two men rose slightly and shook hands across the table.

FICTION



All
Indians Are
Warriors
by William T. Lowe

The van had no business in Rory's barn, especially a van loaded with illegal slot machines. And especially this close to the St. Regis Indian Reservation, where slot machines had caused something of a civil war.

Rory had come home and found Major, his son's pony, grazing on what was left of the summer's flowerbeds. He led Major back to the barn, and there parked inside the big double doors was the van.

He opened the rear doors and looked inside. In the cargo section were ten slot machines. No names, no addresses on the crates. Rory stood and frowned at the contraband cargo.

Like most Mohawks, his hair was jet black and die straight. He wore it shoulder length, caught with a bit of ribbon. He had the typical Indian's heavy chin and strong nose; his eyes were a surprisingly light brown.

Had somebody made a mistake? Not likely—ten slots represented too much money for casual error. It had to be a frame; someone wanted him in trouble. But who? The Warrior Society, perhaps. They had resented his pacifist stand in the gambling wars just a few weeks ago.

The van didn't tell him anything. It was a light delivery

model, no registration, no ignition key, New York plates. The hood was slightly warm. This was a brisk October day; Rory judged the van couldn't have been here longer than two hours. Somebody knew his schedule...

"Your name Rory Horn?"

Rory whirled around; in the open barn door stood two troopers. They were in the full uniform of the New York state police, with the new Glock 17 automatic at the belt. They were both white.

"I'm Rory Horn." So it was a frame. Plant the slots in Rory's barn, call the troopers, watch Rory go to jail. But somehow that didn't seem like the Warriors' style.

The taller trooper lounged against the door frame. "You going to start up your own casino, Rory?" he said easily. "I'll come deal twenty-one for you."

Rory shook his head. "Not me. I never saw that van or those slots before right now."

"No, of course not," the second trooper said sarcastically. He hooked his thumbs in his belt. "Come on, you're going with us." His tone and posture were meant to be intimidating.

Rory knew this type of white man. They could work around Indians, but they never learned to trust them, were even a bit afraid of them. To this white

man Rory and his kind were smart-ass Indians. To the Indians they were clay-headed white men.

"Hold on," Rory said to the first trooper. "What brought you fellows up here? You got a search warrant?"

"Now, Rory," the trooper said gently, "this door here is standing wide open. We're not searching, we're just standing here looking in. We just happen to observe those slot machines."

"Right," said the second trooper belligerently. "This is simple observation. And we got a call from a friend of yours."

"A friend who said I had some stolen property?"

"That's right."

"He didn't give his name, of course."

"That's right. Let's go."

"Just a minute," Rory snapped. He turned and walked to the other side of the barn. He forked hay into Major's stall, added grain, checked the water bucket. Then he walked back to the doorway. "I'll leave a note for my wife," he said.

"No time for that," the second trooper said. "Let's go."

Rory whirled on him. "Am I under arrest?"

"Well, no . . ."

"Then I'm leaving a note."

the police car Rory thought about the recent conflict on the reservation. The issue was gambling; slot machines were the biggest and most irritating part of the problem.

The Akwesasne Mohawks were divided on the issue of casino gambling. One faction wanted open casinos, Las Vegas style. The other wanted no part of that; bingo was enough. Confrontation between the two had been heated, at times violent. A predawn shootout had left two men dead.

The state police had come in to try to maintain peace. They had confiscated the slot machines in the casinos—slots are illegal in New York. There had been strenuous opposition. The militant Warriors Society viewed the police as intruders on a sovereign nation. There had been gunfire and barricades and casualties. The New York newspapers called it the "gambling wars."

Today the big casinos were shuttered and dark. The highways were open again, but it was an uneasy truce. Tensions were high and all sides alert for trouble. And now ten illegal slot machines had appeared in Rory's barn, ready to bring grief to anyone who came near them.

On the way to Massena in

At the police substation in

Massena Rory stood in front of a desk while a sergeant filled out a form.

"Your name?" he asked in a bored voice.

"O-Karatsisto."

The sergeant looked up. "No, I want your English name."

"Rorhare Horn."

"I thank you."

The lieutenant seemed to know all about the van in Rory's barn. He also seemed to know that Rory was a valued employee of the Seaway Authority and had no record of any kind. He would have been happy for Rory to admit that he was babysitting the slot machines for an unnamed third party for an undisclosed sum of money, but Rory did not oblige him. He repeated that he knew nothing of the ownership of the van or its cargo.

The interview was short. Rory felt the lieutenant was just going through the motions of questioning him. He even thanked Rory for coming in. Rory was relieved; if the frame was supposed to result in his arrest it had somehow misfired.

In the hall a familiar voice stopped him. Rory turned and saw an old friend, a young white man in a trooper's uniform. Rory and Nash Seymour had gone to high school together in Salmon River. After that they had grown apart,

Rory to go to college and Nash into law enforcement.

"What'd you do, Rory? Steal somebody's horse?"

"If I had, it would take more than you guys to catch me."

They shook hands warmly. "What's going on, Rory?"

Nash became serious when Rory told him about the slot machines. "I hope we don't start that all over again," Nash said. He had been on the road-blocks during the siege with the Mohawks.

"I hope not, too."

"Say, how are you going to get home? You still live out near Helena?" Nash reached into his pocket. "Take my car. My shift's just started; I won't need it until tomorrow."

"Thanks, Nash, I appreciate it."

"Watch yourself, Rory."

"You, too, Nash. Remember the old saying: be nice to your enemies; it bugs the hell out of them."

Nash grinned. "What big Mohawk chief said that?"

Rory shook his head. "It was a paleface. Fellow name of Oscar Wilde."

As Rory passed the front desk the sergeant stood up and stopped him.

"If you don't mind, son, what does your Indian name mean?"

Rory smiled. "It means Child of the Evening Star."

The sergeant nodded. "Real nice."

Rory drove through the reservation on his way home. At the western boundary he passed a small souvenir shop. A sign on the roof read:

WELCOME TO AKWESASNE—LAND
WHERE THE PARTRIDGE DRUMS

The shop was closed, and weeds grew in its driveway. Few visitors ventured onto the reservation these days. The constant presence of the state police was not inviting, and now winter was coming.

Route 37 widened into Hogsburg's Main Street. On either side were the closed and dark casinos, their vast parking lots empty. There were frequent rumors that the governor and the gaming commission would permit the casinos to reopen, but the days became weeks and the casinos stood empty and silent, their employees idle and restless.

Rory passed the American Legion post on his left; on his right was the ornate Church of Christ, its massive stone walls stretching for almost a full block. Rory watched his rear view mirror; a vehicle had pulled out of the Bear's Den service station and was following him.

It was probably a Warrior patrol, one of many that roamed the reservation. Rory decided to pull over; he was driving a strange car. He stopped and stepped out.

A jeep parked behind him. In it sat two men dressed in army camouflage gear and wearing combat boots. One held an AK 47 assault rifle in his arms; the other carried a shotgun. The Warriors were organized and well armed. And they were very contentious. "If you are not with us, you are against us."

Rory knew the man with the automatic weapon—it was Jake Hightower, one of the Warrior leaders. He lifted a hand in greeting.

Jake stepped out of the jeep, leaving his weapon behind. He was much taller than Rory; he bent his head to speak. "The troopers giving you a hard time, Rory?"

Rory knew that the story of the van and the slot machines and his visit to Massena would cover the reservation by nightfall.

"Trying to," he admitted.

"You want me to have a team watch your house for awhile? Guard any valuable property you might have out there?"

This offer of protection would be a big favor, but a favor that would have to be repaid one

day. "Thanks, Jake, but I think I can handle it."

"Suit yourself." The big Warrior stepped back and returned to his jeep. Rory headed out on 37. It was dark, and he was anxious to get home.

Like many Mohawks Rory lived off the reservation. Housing was scarce there, and his home in Helena was close to Donna's job at the True-Stitch factory in Bombay. Their home was a neat, compact trailer that had been fitted with a weather-tight entrance in front and a large deck in back.

The house and land were his legacy. Rory's father had belonged to a special group of Mohawks, the high steel workers. He and the others worked on the skyscrapers in New York City. Each Monday, well before dawn, they would travel down to raise the skyline of Manhattan still higher. On Friday nights they came back to their families, bearing big paychecks as their forefathers had returned from the hunt bearing game.

His father had insisted Rory go to college, to learn to depend on his mind instead of ice-cold nerves and bowstring reflexes.

Several oak trees shaded his driveway; tonight their heavy

shadows concealed three men. After Rory parked and stepped out of his car, they advanced noiselessly. Rory was surprised to see that one of the men was Chief Douglas Solomon. This had to be a very important mission to bring one of the tribal council chiefs in person.

Chief Solomon was a dignified, middle-aged Mohawk. Behind him stood two Warriors. One carried a Rugers .223 rifle, the other a twelve-gauge shotgun. Rory knew these were the prescribed Warrior weapons.

"Evening, Mr. Horn," Chief Solomon said, as casually as if they had met on a street in Hogsburg.

"Chief," Rory said politely. He glanced again at the weapons and thought of Donna and Rory Junior in the house.

"Forgive the intrusion," Chief Solomon said. "We happen to be most interested in that van parked in your barn. With your permission these men will keep it under observation tonight. Just out of curiosity, you understand."

"I understand." One of the troopers from this afternoon had been detailed to guard the van until it could be towed away. If he had a choice, he would prefer to have these Warriors on guard duty tonight.

"Two things, Chief Solomon,"

Rory said respectfully. The chief inclined his head graciously.

"I hope it will not become necessary to disturb my family," Rory said.

The chief nodded. "It is to be avoided."

Rory went on. "The state police may also be watching," he said. He could not resist adding, "What is in the van is not my property."

"We understand, Mr. Horn. Have a pleasant evening." The three Indians faded into the shadows. The night was silent. Rory looked up at the sky. Stars were beginning to appear as he went inside the house.

Dinner was late, and afterward Rory sat by his son's bed and told him stories about smart foxes and big bears and giant moose and stalwart Indians. Rory Junior drifted off to sleep, clutching his favorite toy, a stuffed giraffe.

Rory and Donna sat at the kitchen table and talked in low voices. "Did you call Uncle Mark?" Rory asked. He had put this request in the note he had left this afternoon.

"I called and left a message at the Red Arrow Gift Shop. That's the procedure, isn't it?"

"Right." Mark Benjamin had been a friend of Rory's father. Very few people knew that

"Uncle Mark" was a senior agent in the New York State Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

"You think Uncle Mark can find out who planted those machines in our barn?" Donna's expression was serious, but she was not frightened. She was a non-native, a white girl Rory had met when they were both college students at Potsdam. They had dated for a year and had been married after graduation.

"I hope so."

Donna poured more coffee. "What's so wrong with slot machines anyway?" she said. "Bingo, lotteries, OTB, slots, what's the difference?"

Rory frowned at his cup. "First of all, there are different forms of gambling," he said slowly. "Ritualistic gambling is a strong part of the Mohawk tradition. The federal government accepts the fact that almost all Indian nations have spiritual games of chance. They might not understand it, but they accept it.

"The Federal Indian Gaming Act permits bingo and some card games on Indian reservations. The people here who want casinos also want slot machines because there's big money to be made with slot machines. And that's the problem. In the state of New York, slot

machines are illegal. Period."

Donna nodded. "And some of the tribe feel we are a sovereign nation and not subject to New York law . . ."

Rory held up his hand and Donna fell silent. He was listening intently. The usual night sounds were gone. He thought he heard a faint sound from the direction of the barn. Donna was watching him. "What is it?" she whispered.

Then the night was torn by the rapid pounding of a heavy gun, frighteningly loud. Without conscious thought Rory grabbed Donna's hand and pulled her with him to the floor.

There was a second burst of fire, louder and closer. The light switch was on the wall above his head; Rory lunged upward and struck the switch with the side of his hand, plunging the kitchen into darkness.

He lay still, trying not to breathe. From the highway came the sound of a car receding into the night. There was a whimper from the next room where Rory Junior lay sleeping. Then nothing, no sound at all.

"Stay down," he whispered to Donna. He rolled to the door, stretched up for the knob, threw himself through the opening into the darkness. He thought he caught the smell of

burnt cordite in the air. In the starshine, shadows gradually took shape; two of them moved toward him. Two men.

"Just a couple of prowlers," one of the Warriors said. "They won't be back." He moved away into the night.

"Hi, kid," said Mark Benjamin, his hand outstretched. "Sorry I'm late for the party."

Mark Benjamin could have been any age from forty-five to sixty. He had a deeply tanned and lined face and innocent blue eyes that somehow inspired confidence. He always dressed in an old fashioned corduroy suit with a chain across the vest. The suit also seemed to inspire confidence.

Benjamin was stationed in Syracuse, but he spent most of his time in the field as an almost independent BCI agent.

Seated at the kitchen table, Mark looked like a successful insurance salesman. "Nothing like a hot cup of good coffee on a cold night," he said with a grateful smile at Donna.

Then to Rory he said, "And nothing like a few slot machines to stir things up, eh, Rory?"

"You're right there. What's so special about those machines somebody dumped on me?"

"Those are very special," Mark said with a broad grin, "because nobody knows where they came from, and nobody knows who's controlling them."

He hitched his chair closer and lowered his voice. "You both remember when the state police confiscated the slots in the Nevada World and the other casinos. There was a hell of a dustup, and the casinos got closed down."

"Now our office hears that some of the chiefs are close to an agreement with the gaming commission to reopen the casinos. I don't know the details; maybe there'll be some form of supervision, some kind of tax, whatever."

"But when the green light comes, the Nevada World and the other houses will want slots, and fast, right?"

Donna and Rory nodded. Mark continued. "Now, there's a crime family that wants this slot business. They want to get their feet in the door with slots and go on from there—bring in their own dealers, have their own security, get a bigger and bigger cut of the take."

"This family is headed by a gent named Dominic Farillo, called Dommy behind his back. And our Dommy thinks he has been a very smart boy."

"He's got ninety or a hundred slots up here right now, hidden

in old barns and empty shacks around little towns like Brasher and Helena, all ready to deliver to the casinos."

"Who gets there first gets the business, right?" asked Donna, her eyes shining.

"And those ten slots on our doorstep are part of his stock?" asked Rory.

"Right," Donna. Wrong, Rory," said Mark, grinning. "That's the beauty part. Those ten slots are wild cards. They're not Dommy's. Now, Dommy has to think two things. First, he's got competition for the Mohawk casino business, and that steams him. Second, he thinks somebody may have hijacked some of his machines, and that steams him even worse."

"So now Dommy will make a mistake," Mark said gleefully. "He's got to come up here and check on his inventory, see if any slots are missing. When we catch him on the ground with his slots, we'll put him away. Trafficking in illegal gaming devices."

"So the ten slots are bait to sucker Dommy." Donna clapped her hands. "That's cool, Uncle Mark!"

Rory agreed. "But why are the chiefs so uptight?"

"Like I said, Solomon and some others are trying to work out a basis for reopening with the commission. They don't

want a bunch of slot machines turning up at the casinos like a shipment of paper towels. It would show bad faith, queer the whole deal. Solomon wants to see those slots safely locked up in the police impound yard, and no place else. You copy?"

In his enthusiasm Mark failed to note the growing look of consternation on Donna's face, the comprehension dawning in Rory's eyes.

"Now, there's another angle," Mark went on. "A couple of people might suspect there's a new player in the game. Someone with slots to sell or lease or whatever. Someone who is advertising for new business.

"They might want to talk a deal with this mystery man, and they'll figure you, kid, for his local agent."

"Me?"

"You, son. It's your barn, isn't it?"

"Wait a minute, Uncle Mark," said Donna. "Did you . . ."

"Wait a minute, Uncle Mark," said Rory. "You did! You brought in that van, you called the police, you squared that lieutenant, you tipped off the chief, *you set up the whole thing!*"

Mark nodded happily. "Pretty neat, eh? I knew you'd like it." He looked from Donna

to Rory, and his smile faded. "You do like it, don't you? Now don't get mad, Rory . . ."

Next morning Rory sat at his desk and tried to study some field reports. His office was in the new Mohawk Council Administration Building on Memorial Street, a severely modern structure that would have been a credit to IBM or DuPont. But Rory was oblivious to the bright colors and sleek furniture around him. He was thinking of the trap in which he had unknowingly been part of the bait.

"I hope it works," he had told Uncle Mark, "but leave me out of it from here on in."

Rory worked for the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority. He had begun on the lofty International Bridge that spanned the river and connected Canada and the United States.

In college he had specialized in environmental science. This year he was on a leave of absence from the Authority to work on the pollution project. For decades the St. Lawrence, which flowed through the reservation, had been polluted by industrial plants upstream.

Now a massive cleanup operation was under way, and it was Rory's job to see that the Indians' traditional hunting,

fishing, and land rights were respected.

His phone rang. "Dommy's moving," Uncle Mark said. "Private plane to the Clinton County airport. Headed for Fort Covington in a rental. We're on him."

"Good. Let me know when it's over."

"Right, kid."

Five minutes later the phone rang again. "Could we meet at the Nevada this morning, Mr. Horn? We have much to talk about." It was Chief Solomon.

He couldn't concentrate on the field reports anyway. "I'll be there in fifteen minutes," Rory said.

They met in a private room on the top floor. An armed Warrior admitted him at a side door. On his way to the stairs, Rory glanced at the rows of gaming tables shrouded in dustcovers, the stocked bars, the huge wagon wheel chandeliers, the vacant wall spaces where slot machines had been ranked.

The room was quite large. A window facing west looked toward the mammoth Eisenhower Locks through which moved ocean commerce bound for the Great Lakes.

In a glass case against a wall was a stunning example of Akwesasne basket weaving: a graceful, intricate work of

sweet grass and thin strips of black ash. Rory recognized it from pictures he had seen as a duplicate of the gift presented to Pope John Paul II by the Mohawk nation.

Rory sat facing Solomon across a table. "I think I know your position, Mr. Horn," said Solomon in a condescending tone. "You don't object to gambling, but you do object to violence."

"Right."

"You would like to see the money generated by casinos kept in the community to do good works, correct?"

He was being talked to like a schoolchild, and Rory resented it. He felt his cheeks begin to redden, but he answered the question.

"Yes, I would. Who wouldn't? The old folks home needs repair, the ambulance units need new equipment, the town needs a police force . . ."

Solomon held up his hand. "I know all that. What makes you think I don't want those things, too? I live here the same as you do.

"But, Mr. Horn, everything is not always black and white." There was the patronizing tone Rory resented. He pulled his feet together under his chair.

"All right, Chief Solomon, let me ask you something." He jumped to his feet and leaned

across the table. "The big hangup here is slot machines. They're illegal in New York. They're dirty with mob money." Rory swung his arm to indicate the room and the building.

"Why the hell can't you have a good casino without slots? You can have everything else, wheels, poker, bingo . . . I hear that's enough for other reservation casinos. Where do you get off being so stubborn about the goddamn slots?"

Rory shut up and sat down. I went too far, he told himself. He tried to frame an apology; then he was aware that Chief Solomon was laughing gently.

"It will surprise you to know that I'm way ahead of you on that, Rory." Rory stared at him, and Solomon laughed. "All I want is a clean operation. If it's without slots, great."

The chief leaned across the table. "Besides, they've got electronic gaming devices now that make those things in your barn look like antique junk. Things that would draw crowds from all over the East Coast."

"But, Rory, we've got a long way to go." The chief was quite serious now. "The police invaded our land and took our property. Some of the men want reparation for that, and you can't blame them."

"If we get the casinos open again, we may have federal su-

pervision, inspectors telling us what to do. Some of the men won't stand for that. Sure, some of us may be too bullheaded, and some of us may be too proud, but we've got to . . ."

The door opened suddenly, and a man stepped inside. He put his back to the door and locked it. He wore a business suit with a white shirt and silk tie. And a short-barreled .38 revolver which was pointed at Rory. The man was panting as if he had run up the stairs, but the gun was quite steady.

"Dominic Farillo," Solomon murmured to Rory. He took a step forward. "Mr. Farillo," he said, "do you have an appointment?"

Farillo gestured him back with the gun. "Keep out of this, chief." His eyes were on Rory. "You must be Horn, Rory Horn, right?"

Rory nodded. He raised his hands level with his chest.

"You bastard! You set me up. The Feds are all over me." He took a step toward Rory. "Why didn't you come to me first? We could have cooked a deal. Having an Indian like you on the inside would have kept things real smooth."

Rory glanced around him. There was no weapon in sight, not even a paperweight on the table. Solomon stood several feet away. There was nothing,

and the gun was pointed right at his chest.

Farillo's face was white with rage. Moisture ran from one side of his mouth. "I gave the Feds the slip, but I gotta keep movin'. You cost me a bundle, Indian, and I'm gonna blast you for it..." He drew back the hammer of the gun. Suddenly Rory thought of a story he had told Rory Junior—what the Indian had done when he met the bear in the woods.

Rory threw back his head and stretched his mouth wide. A loud, strident war cry rang out in the room, rising in pitch, bouncing from the walls, an unearthly paeon of defiance.

Dommy stood transfixed, petrified, his eyes wide in fear. From the floor Rory swung an uppercut that had one hundred and seventy pounds of angry Indian behind it. His fist caught Dommy on the side of the jaw; Dommy reeled backward two steps and collapsed.

"Damn!" Solomon gasped. "Damn!" He stepped over and kicked the gun into a corner. "For somebody who doesn't want to be a Warrior, you certainly give a hell of an imitation. You even scared me!"

Rory massaged his hand. He wouldn't admit how sore it was. "I tell my son the stories my father told me."

Solomon nodded. "I remem-

ber. You know, all Indians are Warriors when the pressure is on."

They became aware of a pounding on the door. Solomon stepped over and opened it. Two Warriors rushed in, weapons ready. Solomon motioned to the man on the floor. In a minute he had been bound and gagged. The Indians looked at Rory respectfully as they carried the limp form away.

"That piece of dirt will be placed where Mr. Mark Benjamin and his people will find him. And within the hour."

Solomon smiled at the expression on Rory's face. "Oh, yes, we know who our friends are. The list includes a large number of white men..."

Rory wasn't listening; he was tired. Maybe he would go home early today, help Rory Junior saddle up Major to do some riding. Then have a quiet evening with his son and Donna. And keep the phone off the hook. The chief was still talking in his confident tone of voice. "We will solve this problem, Rory, with the help of people like yourself. Remember, we've got an edge over the white man."

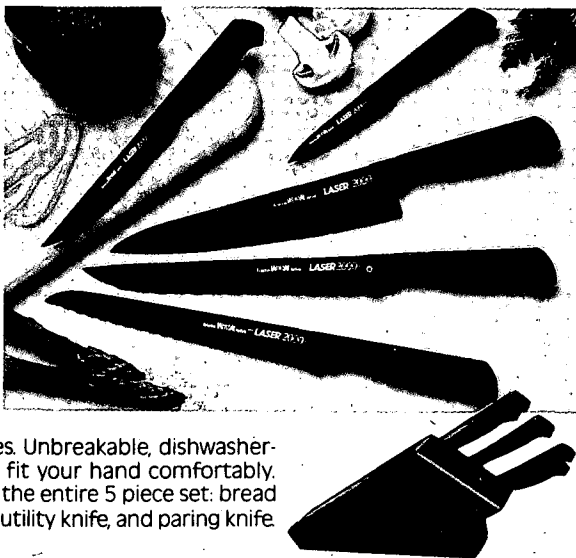
He looked at Rory expectantly. "Oh, right," Rory said, "we were here first."

He crossed to the door and opened it. "So long, chief. I'm taking the rest of the day off."

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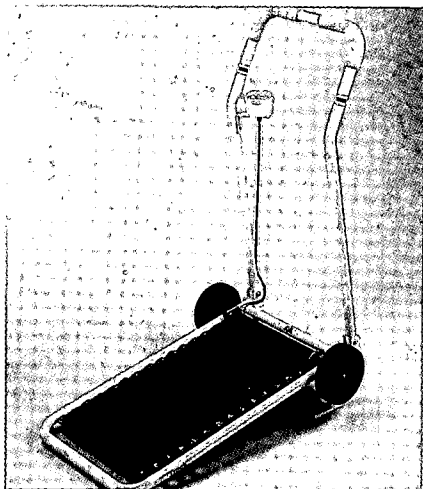
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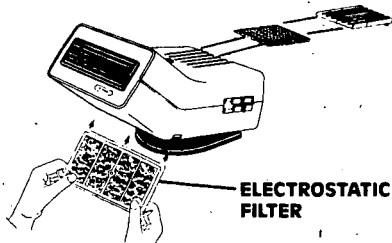
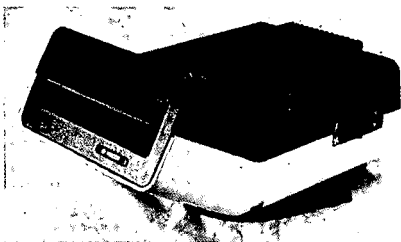
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FICTION

Separate Vacations

by Maggie Wagner-Hankins



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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“I can’t believe after thirty-five years of marriage you want to take separate vacations.” His voice was a hurt whine as he focused on the flyer she had handed him about the ranch.

“It’s not exactly—separate vacations.”

“Well, I don’t know what else you’d call it. We won’t be together. We won’t even see each other the whole time we’re there.”

That was true. In fact, it was the main selling point as far as Grace was concerned. Five glorious days of no Harold to analyze every word she spoke, to shadow every step she took. No Harold breathing down her neck or looking over her shoulder to see what she was doing (which was never much of anything anyway, because what could a person do when she hadn’t even a smidgen of privacy in her life?).

“I don’t know how you’ll manage, Grace. Really, what if something happens? What if you get—well—mauled by some wild beast? What then?”

“I won’t be mauled. The people at the ranch assured me it’s perfectly safe. It’s a totally controlled experience. And just think, you won’t have any responsibilities; you won’t even have to *think* about what I’m doing. You can just relax and be free to experience it. Doesn’t that appeal to you?”

Of course that first part wouldn’t appeal to him. She shouldn’t have even mentioned his not having to think about what she was doing. What else was his life for? But maybe he’d focus on the rest of it—the relaxation, the freedom.

He lay back in his recliner and screwed up his face as if considering it, while Grace waited, acting unconcerned about his response. It wouldn’t do to appear too eager, or he’d pick her brain to pieces on the whys of it. “Well, I don’t know,” he finally said, “it might be okay. But then again, it might be just asking for trouble.”

“Well, think about it, won’t you? Look some more at the flyer. I’m going to start supper.”

Harold touched a spot on his recliner and was immediately enclosed in a six foot square Plexiglas box. Grace knew he was setting the dials for a spring shower in the woods with a light breeze. Lately that was his favorite, a good sign. It meant he craved relaxation. And his choosing a natural setting rather than one of the indoor ones—the concert hall, for instance, or a big band dance lounge or sauna—gave her hope that the trip to the transference ranch would strike just the right chord in him.

As she was preparing the vegetables (Harold would only eat two kinds now, baby carrots and brocciflower; tonight it was carrots), his voice came to her through the intercom. She heard rain in the background. He must have increased the intensity on the spring shower.

"What are you cooking?"

"The same thing I always cook on Tuesdays. Spaghetti with mushroom sauce, baby carrots, and raisin Jell-O on the side." Harold was a vegetarian. That was okay. A lot of people were these days, and she had gotten used to cooking meatless meals. When she got really desperate for beef, she'd go to the cafe across town and have an old fashioned hamburger.

"Did you pay the power bill today?"

It was a totally idiotic question, she knew, and yet he had asked it on such a regular basis over the years that it sounded almost natural, like saying good morning to the neighbors or bless you when someone sneezed.

"Of course. When have I missed paying the power bill on Tuesdays? I called it in at nine o'clock, if you want to check the log."

"Your sarcasm really gets to me, Grace, and there's no reason for it. I'm just making sure."

"I thought you were relaxing. Do you want to come out here and stand with me while I fix dinner so you can be sure I put enough pepper on the carrots?"

There was no answer, but she could sense him, still hovering over her via the intercom connecting his environmental simulation chamber with her kitchen.

I am getting sarcastic, aren't I? she thought, allowing herself a smile. At least he couldn't see her.

It was the flyer that was causing it. Just the act of sending for it had emboldened her a little. She daydreamed about the possibilities a vacation like this offered, envisioned herself at the ranch, strong and free. She had never really stood up to Harold's hovering, pestering ways before, but had accepted as just his way his need for total supervision of her every move, his insistence on dissecting every comment she made.

A wife's duty was to put up with her husband, and a husband's was to put up with his wife. It was practically written in black and white in the contract. And if there was more putting up with required of one spouse than the other, well, that was just, as Harold sometimes said, tough titmouse. Things had changed since the old

days when nobody put up with anything and marriages lasted an average of eleven months. She was almost as proud as Harold that their marriage had lasted so long, particularly since they hadn't really loved each other for the last thirty years, and felt it was a tribute to her patience and her ability to adapt to less than pleasant circumstances.

But now the opportunity of a short period of freedom from him was right in front of her, and she wasn't about to give it up without some effort.

Just the thought of roaming the simulated jungle environment on the ranch sent a tingle through her, filling her with a foretaste of the power enjoyed by the powerful animals that hunted there.

Maybe the vacation could even do something for Harold, like help him gain a wider perspective on life. He was far too concerned with the tiny little closed up world he had created for himself.

She poured them both milk and thought about the options the ranch offered. There was no doubt which plan she would choose when they got down to making their choices. She had always loved cats—the graceful way they moved, the sinuous power barely concealed beneath their sleek coats.

That was one thing she didn't have to worry about with Harold—that he would choose the same plan she did. He hated cats. Hadn't he had both of hers put to sleep when she was out shopping, right after they were married? It was so cruel of him she'd almost filed for an annulment, but he'd talked his way out of it using some half-baked excuse about an allergy from his mother's side, and had gone on and on about how disgusting they were, killing innocent little animals for food whenever they got the chance, no matter how much cat food they got in their bowls every day. No, she could almost predict which plan he'd select if he agreed to the trip at all. He'd be herbivorous, and a runner.

"In my youth I could run like a young gazelle." How many times had he said those words. She'd been tempted to make a sampler of it in her folk arts class. Wouldn't it look great, hanging on the wall over their bed? *In my youth I could run like a young gazelle.*

Well, he wasn't a young gazelle any more. He was a middle-aged moose with a paunch and jowls. Still, she knew he looked back on those days as his best. They probably had been. Too bad they'd been over around the time they got married.

Yes, she was pretty sure he'd opt for something in the deer family, something swift and lean and light on its feet. And, glory to

God in the highest, they'd be miles apart. She let out a deep, wistful sigh. As she might have expected, Harold's voice asked into the air just over her head, "You tired, Grace?" Of course he hadn't turned off the intercom. She couldn't even sigh in privacy.

In bed that night, she brought it up again.

"You know, if we sign up now, we get a twenty percent discount. It's their founder's day celebration."

"I don't know, Grace. I just don't know if we ought to. It's a lot of money."

"We can afford it. It won't cost a cent more than that furniture we were planning to buy for the rec room, and we can certainly wait another year or two on that. The kids never come any more anyway, so who's there to use it?" She didn't add, it's because of you, Mr. Buttinski, that they stay away, because, first of all, there was no point sticking a knife in him and twisting, and second of all, he wouldn't believe it anyway. He thought all fathers told their grown children where they should go to dinner on their anniversaries and what color socks to buy the kids.

"I don't know, Grace."

"Picture it, Harold. You, a young gazelle, prancing through a meadow of tall grass, the wind in your face, the scent of clean, sweet air in your distended nostrils." She felt him settle into the mattress, a smile begrudgingly playing across his face.

He opened his eyes and looked at her. "Are you sure this is safe?"

"Harold, they've been doing it for years. It's perfectly safe. The Phillers did it two years ago, and they said it was a wonderful experience."

"What if you stay stuck in the animal?"

"Harold, you aren't *in* an animal. You *become* an animal. It's something to do with rearranging your molecules—Jerry Philler could explain it more scientifically. But you just get in the box and you become whatever it is you want to become."

"I don't know. It sounds kind of unnatural to me. How can they do that?"

"I don't know. How can they send someone back into the past? But they've done it. They're *scientists*, Harold. They can do practically anything now. This is probably nothing to them."

He grunted and rolled over. "I'll think about it."

They lay there awhile in silence. She knew from the absence of his snore that he was still awake. Maybe he was envisioning himself leaping through a field of tall grass.

"Harold?"

"Yeah?"

"What would you be? If we did it, I mean?"

"That's easy. Can't you guess?"

"I can guess. A gazelle."

"You got it." A minute later he said, "Grace?"

"Hmmm?"

"What about you? You wouldn't change your mind, would you, and be a gazelle with me?"

And have you critiquing every prance I made? Concerning yourself over the quality of every blade of grass I chose to nibble? she thought. Not on your life. But she only answered, "I don't think so, dear. I really do have my heart set on being something in the cat family."

"That's a shame. We won't be able to get near each other. Or will we?"

"I don't think so. They say when you make the transference, you get the same instincts, in a watered down version I imagine, that the real animals have. They could never keep the cats anywhere near the game animals."

Thank God.

"I suppose not. It's too bad, though. Also too bad we haven't worked harder on the mental telepathy stuff. It'd be nice to be able to know what's going on with each other, don't you think?"

"Um-hmmm. But it's only for five days. I think we can stand to be in suspense that long. Afterward you can tell me all about your experience, and I'll tell you about mine."

"I guess. I still don't like it very well, though. It really is almost like taking separate vacations."

She smiled into the darkness. The words *separate vacations* floated through her mind as she drifted off to sleep, still smiling.

"Grace, we'll do it. By God, we'll do it!" He slammed the flyer onto the breakfast table, affirming his commitment.

"You dreamed of being a gazelle, didn't you?"

He smiled self-consciously. "I have to admit I did."

"I thought so. You were making little running movements during the night, and you kept doing sniffing things with your nose."

"Well, I guess that helped me make up my mind. Say, what's that on your blouse?"

She was so elated that she didn't even resent his scrutiny this morning. "Some strawberry jam I spilled on it."

"Here, let me see if I can get it out for you—"

"Harold, I'll take *care* of it. Now, why don't you sit down and enjoy your breakfast. I'll call the agency after we eat and book our places at the ranch."

"What did *you* dream last night?" he asked, scooting up to the table and tucking his napkin under his chin. He laid another across his lap. Harold didn't like food on his clothes. Or anyone else's, for that matter. "Did you dream about being a pussycat?"

Did I ever, she thought. But it's nothing I'd care to share with you. It was far too lovely to talk about in ordinary language. "No, I don't recall dreaming anything."

It had been so wonderful she had resisted waking up for as long as possible. She could still feel the way her shoulder and thigh muscles worked as she moved through the jungle and out onto the grassy plain in search of food, could feel the tension in her body as she prepared to spring, could recall the joyous abandon in running on all fours in great, long, reaching strides.

"This toast isn't our usual bread, is it?"

She blinked and came back to the present.

"No, dear. It's a new brand. I thought I'd try it. Don't you like it?"

"It's all right. I just noticed it has a little different flavor. Try it and tell me what you think it has that the other doesn't."

She tried a bite, just to appease him, and could tell no difference. "I don't know."

"Oh, well, I guess it's not really important," he said, not sounding convinced.

Are any of the things you think about important? she wanted to ask. Oh, it would be so wonderful to be in that other world. For the first time, she wondered what would happen if she never came back—if she just stayed out there in the far recesses of the ranch and they never found her to put her back in the box and change her into herself again.

But of course they would find her. It was a big place but not that big, not for a full grown tiger. She'd need to eat. They could find her by following the trail of dead game she would have sustained herself on. Or maybe they would even close down for a bit and remove the food supply until she gave herself up.

It was a nice dream, though.

"You know," Harold said, practically mirroring her thoughts, "I wonder if anyone ever just stays like that. You know, someone with a lot of money who could afford to live out there as an animal nonstop."

"I don't know. It doesn't seem like it would be too healthy. Their longest plan is ten days. I imagine anything over that might cause some kind of structural damage or maybe even mental problems or something."

"Probably just as well. We were born people, and we ought to stay people. Animals can't even talk. But I was just thinking that there are some people who'd probably be better off as animals. You know, like Burt Rossner. He's such a pigheaded person to deal with, hates everyone, he'd probably be just as happy to be turned into a mule or something and live out in a pasture."

"I suppose."

"What're you going to do today?"

"Oh, I don't know. I have some shopping to do. For Stephanie's new baby." Stephanie was their neighbor. She'd just had a baby girl, and Grace loved buying things for her.

"Think I'll go along," Harold announced. "Keep you company."

"Oh, you really don't need to, dear. I'm just going to be looking at baby things."

"That's okay. Maybe I can help. It never hurts to have another opinion on things, does it?"

This was the biggest drawback to their both being retired. Before, she'd at least been able to get away from him at work, and if she was in the mood to shop by herself, she'd just stop on her way home. But now none of Harold's time was spoken for. He was available twenty-four hours a day to serve as her shadow.

"All right. But now I think I'll call the agency about our reservations."

"Good idea." Harold jumped up. "I'll just pick up the extension, so you don't have to repeat the whole conversation to me afterwards." He settled himself at the kitchen phone station while she went in to her desk and called the number on the flyer.

The ranch was huge—thousands and thousands of acres, all sectioned off to approximate an incredible array of natural environments and wildlife habitats.

Their special service rep explained as much as she could about the animals they wished to become, and gave them each a

personality analysis to be sure there was nothing in their natures that would make their choices unsuitable. Grace passed with flying colors.

So did Harold, the gazelle. His area, Grace was pleased to note, was at least a mile from where she would be roaming, and was separated from hers by a road with electric fences on each side. There was no way Harold would be able to get near her, even if for some reason he decided to try to find her while they were still in their animal forms. He'd had an electric shock when he was a boy, and he still worried that it had left lasting damage to his psyché and certain other parts of him.

The thought of five whole days of peace, freedom, and privacy elated her so that she was filled with a sudden tenderness toward Harold. When they kissed and said their goodbyes, just prior to their final phase of instruction before the transference took place, she felt almost guilty about her eagerness to get away from him. Seeing his reluctance to part with her, she gave him an extra kiss and a pat on the shoulder and said, "Bye, honey. You have a great time. I'll see you right here on Wednesday."

"Honey," he called after her, "did you give the kids the number for this place?"

"Yes, Harold."

"Good. Never know when they might need something. Oh, and did you—"

"Yes, yes, Harold, I did all those things. Now let's don't keep these nice people waiting while we go down the checklist again. I'll see you soon."

She noted, looking back as she was driven away toward her embarkation point, that Harold already looked rather deerlike, his big brown eyes trailing the truck as if he had just one more question to ask her.

Bye, Harold. Enjoy your grass. Already the preliminary enzyme they'd given her to stimulate tigerlike instincts in her was taking effect. She found herself craving a hamburger as she hadn't in a year.

It was incredible. Unreal. Sometimes, not very often but a few times during that first day in her new surroundings, she almost forgot she was a human being. But then she'd remember Harold. The funny thing was, when she thought about him now she thought of him as a gazelle, and she was almost embarrassed to

realize that she envisioned him more as a snack than as a husband. Thank goodness he was miles away.

Most of the time she just let herself go, living in the moment as most animals surely did. She saw things differently, not just because her eye level was different or because she was walking on four legs or because she was so much bigger than she'd been before. Things had a new relationship to one another, and she was very aware of each one's importance in maintaining the delicate balance of the relationship. The grass, the ground, the sky, the insects buzzing around her face, the wind, the animals she killed for food, she herself—all were part of one big whole, pieces of a puzzle that fit perfectly and precisely together. She felt at home against the earth, not as a landlord but as a part of it.

It was the freedom, too. There was no one to keep track of her moves, to caution her, to advise her. She had her instinct and her common sense (one of the human aspects, along with her memory when she chose to use it, that had been left to her in the transference) to direct her actions. Occasionally she'd catch sight of one of the ranch hands, just making sure things were okay. But they didn't pester. They didn't encroach on her territory. They just let her be. They let her live in peace.

She'd thought it might bother her to kill animals for food, but the fact that she had omnivorous tastes had convinced the analysts that she'd have no problem, once she was injected with the tiger personality enzyme. Someone like Harold wouldn't have been able to handle it. His natural revulsion toward eating meat would have set up a resistance to the enzyme, and he'd have been a very hungry, very crazy tiger by the time he was turned back into human form. But then they'd never have let Harold become a meat-eating animal. They were very careful about things like that.

The first animal she killed was an injured deer. She felt a fleeting surprise that she felt no guilt over the act. The animal's body was food, just as one day her body would be food for something, whether vultures or insects or just the earth that would nourish itself from her flesh. And so when she killed the deer (quickly and cleanly, she was pleased to note, and not bunglingly as she might have expected for her first try), the act seemed as natural as breathing in and out. She ate as much as she could and spent the afternoon lolling in the sun.

Stretching was a particularly enjoyable pastime during these days. So was lying there, watching the world happen around her.

She also enjoyed growling, purring, and grooming herself.

By the fifth day, she had managed to put Harold and most of the rest of her human life almost entirely out of her mind. She knew, somewhere in the back of her head, that something was drawing to a close, that she should be preparing for something, but she didn't give it too much thought.

She was hungry.

Getting up and stretching, she loped off in search of something to eat. She'd tried some small mammals, but they didn't satisfy her as a larger animal did. Maybe there would be another deer in the area. There was game to be had, but it wasn't abundant. She had to work for it. She'd been told that up front, and it didn't bother her. But today she had put off exerting the effort to find food until her hunger had grown acute, so now, when she noticed an animal running almost straight for her despite her being so obviously visible, it didn't occur to her to wonder why it was acting in such a careless manner. If the animal was that stupid, she'd just go ahead and eat it without a chase. She flexed her muscles while it bounded eagerly up to her.

Not until after it was dead and she was devouring its left shoulder did she notice the strange odor about it. Some trace of her human senses was able to supply a name for it that was unfamiliar to her tiger self. *Burnt*. The animal smelled burnt, or singed. Singed hair, that was it.

She looked at the gazelle and noticed a dark, blackened patch of hair on its flank, and another on its neck, as if it had bumped into something hot.

I should be remembering something, she thought as she continued eating.

“**M**rs. Harrison, I'm afraid we're having a little trouble locating your husband,” the service rep said. Grace was in the recovery room, once again in human form and waiting for her mental, emotional, and instinctual chemistry to catch up with the physical.

The impact of the representative's words on her wasn't as severe as she'd expected it to be. She felt almost calm. “Is it possible,” she asked carefully, “that he could have gotten out?”

“Oh, highly unlikely. The whole range is fenced by electrical barbed wire. Even if he'd tried, he'd have gotten a bad enough burn to send him back.”

"Could he have jumped the fence? I mean, if he was a really strong, healthy gazelle?"

"I—suppose it's—possible. But again, it's highly unlikely. And why would anyone want to? If your husband had wanted to terminate the experience, he could have come to the embarkation station. All guests are told about this. It's stressed so that no matter how 'in character' they are, they could hardly ever forget it." It was true. Grace had always had the thought in the back of her head that if she was finding the experience disagreeable in any way, she could go back to where she had entered the habitat and they would immediately return her to normal.

"Anyone who could make it past all the hindrances we have up would have to be very determined," said the rep. Grace thought about the time Harold had flown alone through a major ice storm just so he could be with her when she gave Stephanie's baby shower, in order not to miss out on any of the details.

And the time he had masqueraded as a woman because her ladies' club luncheon had been females only and he hadn't wanted her to miss him.

"I'm sure they would," Grace reassured the woman. "And I'm sure you'll find my husband. He must have just wandered off someplace. By the way, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"Would a guest's body go back to its original form sooner or later without intervention from you, or would he remain in the animal form until you 'deprogrammed' him?"

"I suppose you're asking because you're wondering if, in case your husband is out there wandering around lost, he'll change back into his human form so we can spot him easier."

"Yes, that's why I'm asking."

"Well, the body would eventually go back on its own, but it would be a slow and probably not too pleasant experience. But I have every confidence that we'll find your husband long before that could happen to him. I'm guessing we'll locate him in a matter of a few hours."

"I'm sure you will. Now I have another question. It's just curiosity—this is all so fascinating. What if," she asked delicately, "one of your guests, heaven forbid, of course, should die while in animal form? Would they be transformed immediately back into human form, or would they just waste away as an animal?"

"Mrs. Harrison! I hope you're not assuming—"

"Of course not. It's a hypothetical question. I'm a writer, you see, and I'm just naturally curious about things."

"Well, in that case," the rep said, still looking uncomfortable, "I suppose the—departed person would maintain the animal form for as long as it took for—the remains to—"

"Rot?" Grace asked. The service representative nodded and looked more uncomfortable still.

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Grace, getting up, feeling almost like herself again, "I think I'll just go on home now. My children will be wondering how everything went, and I need to take care of some business. My husband would want me to do that. He's so picky about things' being done right and on time. You just call me when you find out anything, and I'll keep the home fires burning until he turns up."

"If that's the way you want it, Mrs. Harrison. I feel terrible about this, but I'm sure it'll all be cleared up in no time. I can't understand—"

"Oh, don't give it a thought. Harold was probably enjoying himself so much that he couldn't stand the thought of its ending so soon. You know, in his youth he could run like a young gazelle. He's probably just finding it hard to give up."

Grace made a mental note, as she drove away, to stop by the market and buy some ground beef. Maybe the kids would like to bring their families over for hamburgers this evening.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

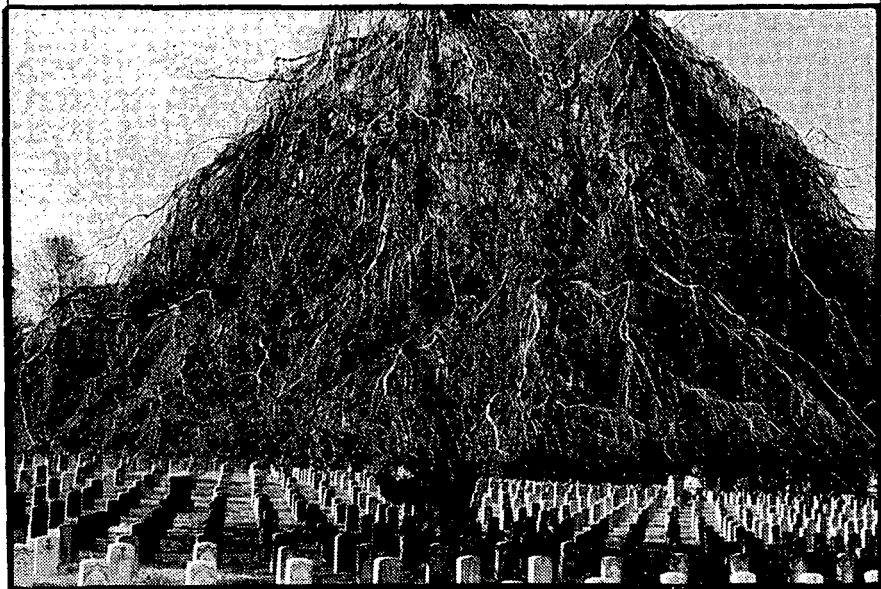


Photo by Algimantas Kezys

No comment. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10168-0035. Please label your entry "November Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit.

The winning entry for the June Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 155.

FICTION

Deadly Money

by Dick Stodghill

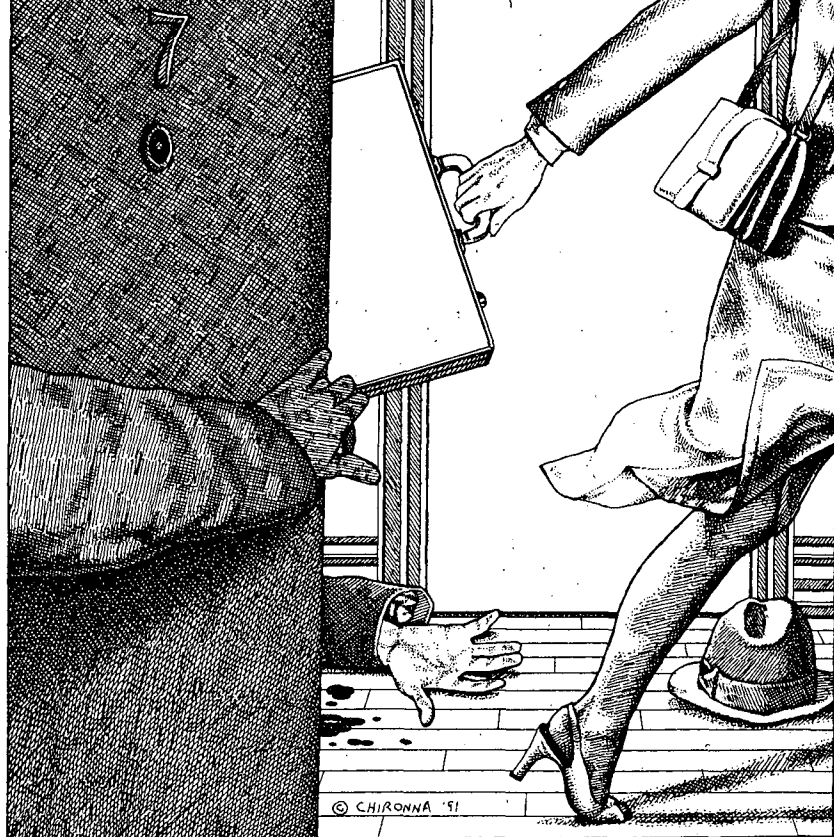


Illustration by Ron Chironna

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I started the trouble by saying, "Haven't gotten anywhere on locating the Morgan girl, have you?"

Jack Eddy continued rubbing Simonize on the hood of his brown Auburn sedan. A slight tensing of his body was all that told me my arrow had hit home. Seconds passed; it seemed he wasn't going to react.

My thoughts wandered. It was the beginning of my first two-day weekend in months. The Saturday morning sunshine and crisp September air were invigorating, my old wool sweater was warm and comfortable. I had a date lined up for evening. All was well with my world.

Then Jack raised his head and looked toward me. Briefly, but enough to chill the air a bit more. He said, "It doesn't rate top priority, pal."

Needling a man like Jack Eddy was foolhardy. Beneath a veneer of affability lay a passion to get ahead at any cost, a single-mindedness that made him a packet of dynamite with a quick fuse. Even to those on his side he was dangerous. My excuse for acting recklessly was his daily complaining that business was slow at the Akron branch of Wellington's National Detective Agency. Everything was slow in the au-

turn of 1937, of course. Conditions had improved considerably during the previous four years, yet the Great Depression lingered on.

Rather than being prudent and laying off I said, "Too busy on all your big cases, huh? It's been more than two months now, and you haven't turned up a single lead, have you?"

Jack dropped the polishing cloth. For a moment he remained motionless, head down, hands pressed tightly against the long hood of the car. When he straightened up, I looked quickly away. Beyond the wire fence where Dudley Street ended at Willard the leaves hadn't started to turn on the tall elms and maples in East Akron Cemetery. Still, something was different. I couldn't have explained why, but a week earlier it had looked like summer and now it didn't.

When I risked a glance, Jack's jaw was set and his hard brown eyes were locked on mine. "What do you know about it, friend?" he said. "Got a way to check the agency files, have you?"

I smiled. "If you'd had any luck, you would have mentioned it, that's all."

"Sure of that, are you? Think I come running to you every time something happens, is that it?"

"Look, Jack—"

He took two quick steps and poked a finger against my chest. Hard enough to make me take a backward step. "No, you look," he said. "If you've got any complaints about the way the agency operates, you know what you can do with them."

He went back to the Auburn, picked up the cloth, and began rubbing more vigorously than before.

I remained where I was for several seconds, feeling the tender spot on my chest. Then, having had enough of his company, I climbed the steps to the porch of Mrs. Bauer's boarding house. Once out of hearing range I murmured, "Sorehead."

The front door flew open as I was reaching for the knob. I jumped aside as Paul Bauer came charging out. The husky elder son of Bus and Ivy Bauer had a gym bag in hand and a look of determination on his face. "Where are you off to in such a rush?" I called after him.

"Got our first game," he replied impatiently, as if I should have known.

And I should have; the game had been a major topic of conversation at the supper table all week. Paul, a senior at East High, was a tackle on the football team. The Orientals were opening their season at New Philadelphia, and Paul was

cocksure of the outcome. Having watched them practice a few times, I was less optimistic.

From the kitchen doorway I said, "Any coffee left?"

Without bothering to look up from her sinkful of dirty dishes Mrs. Bauer said, "You've had three cups already."

"Didn't realize you were keeping score."

"Oh, go ahead and help yourself. Then get on about your business and stop pestering me." When I opened a cupboard door she said, "Don't get a clean cup, for heaven's sake. Here, Bram, here's the one you used at breakfast."

I carried the steaming coffee back to the living room, wondering why everyone was in a foul mood on such a bright and lovely day. The morning's *Cleveland Plain Dealer* was lying where Bus Bauer had dropped it on his way to work a six hour shift in the vulcanizing pit at Goodyear. I skimmed the front page. Roosevelt had repeated his "no war" pledge. The Vatican said the Nazi anti-Christianity creed meant war. Take your choice, or flip a coin.

Wallace Beery was in a hospital after shooting himself in the leg with a blank cartridge while making a movie. The Akron mayor's race was heating up, and Walter P. O'Neil, the sheriff, blamed plumbers

for yesterday's jailbreak. He said they left the cellblock door open when they went to lunch. I had covered the escape, writing a brief story in time for the final edition of the *Akron Times-Press*. The *Plain Dealer* contained later information. Two of the three escapees, both nineteen, had forced a taxi driver to take them to Columbus, then left him standing beside the road in his underwear. Probably didn't tip him.

Jack Eddy came in and plopped down on the couch as I turned to the sports section. I ignored him. Cleveland pitcher Johnny Allen was 12-0 after beating the Red Sox, but the Indians were far down in the standings. A minute or so passed in silence. Jack ended it by saying, "As a matter of fact, buddy, we turned up a lead on Marcia Morgan just the other day."

I said, "Oh?" and pretended to go on reading, but my thoughts had drifted to the antisocial daughter of a man who had been murdered in early summer. Jack had recovered a fifty thousand dollar insurance payment and returned it to the widow in cash. The next morning Marcia had vanished. So had the money. Having had enough notoriety to last her a lifetime, the mother had hired the Wellington Agency to trace

her daughter rather than notifying the police.

"She may be holed up in Denver," said Jack. "The branch there is checking."

"How'd they know about it?"

"We circulated her picture to all thirty-three offices. An operative there thinks he spotted her."

"What happens if he's right?"

"We collar her and bring her back. Along with whatever's left of the fifty grand."

"Suppose she won't come? You can't extradite her without the police and county prosecutor's being in on it."

Jack laughed in the terse, scornful manner I had come to know well during the months since he had arrived in town. "Are you kidding or what?" he said. "Trussed up in the back seat of a car, what choice will she have?"

I tapped a cigarette from a pack of Spuds, shaking my head in mock disbelief. "You people don't have any regard for the law at all, do you?"

Jack leaned toward me, holding out his hand. "Gimme one of those coffin nails." When I had, and then held a match for him, he said, "Wait for the law to do something, and we'll all be dead and buried. The agency doesn't clown around like that."

* * *

I had an answer for the songwriter: yes, I had seen a dream walking. In a clinging dress of pale green and a pert white hat with matching gloves, Sue Baney was just that. It had been a month since we first met during the course of a typically hectic Jack Eddy case. When it was over, Sue was out of a job and considering returning home to West Virginia. Before she had time to make a decision, Jack heard of an opening in the office of an accounting firm and recommended her for the position. I was even happier about it than Sue.

We had dinner at the Garden Grill, a posh downtown restaurant that I couldn't afford on a reporter's salary. After playing the role of big spender had put a serious dent in my bankroll, we went to the ballroom at Summit Beach Park and danced to the music of Johnny Martone, a local orchestra that had the latest big band arrangements down pat.

The floodlights up the hill at League Park made me aware of how I had changed in the weeks since Sue and I had met. Before that I would have been part of the crowd watching the Akron Yankees and Canton Terriers in the final game of the playoff that would decide the Mid-Atlantic League championship. Now the pleasure of holding

Sue Baney in my arms pushed all thoughts of baseball aside.

Even seeing Jack Eddy dance by with Kitty Bauer pressed tightly against him didn't affect me. No one, Kitty least of all, had ever known that until Sue entered my life she had been the object of my affection. Some might have said that Kitty, the vivacious daughter of Bus and Ivy Bauer, was prettier than Sue. They would have gotten an argument from me. There was an ethereal charm about Sue that went beyond mere prettiness. With no intent on her part, she had cast a spell over me, and I was hopelessly captivated.

It was while we were gyrating to a frantic rendition of "The Big Apple" that Jack managed to jar me back to reality. I thought he was trying to cut in when he tapped me on the shoulder. As I turned, frowning, he said, "I've got some news, buddy. Want to be clued in?"

We followed him to where Kitty was waiting at the edge of the floor, her face pale and tense. Remembering her brother's football game, I felt a pang of fear. They played rough in northeast Ohio. "What news, Jack?" I said, anxious to know yet expecting the worst.

"I just checked in with the agency. The night-duty man

heard from our op in Denver, the one shagging the woman he thought was Marcia Morgan. He's sure of it now, but they want me out there before they make the grab."

"Is that all?" I was indignant. He had given me a scare for nothing. "For crying out loud, Jack, I figured it was something urgent."

"Is that *all*, you say? Weren't you the one complaining we hadn't made any progress?"

"So it's great, but couldn't it have waited until morning?"

"I'll be long gone by then if I can make connections." He took Kitty's arm as he turned toward the exit. She resisted. "Come on, kiddo," he said, pulling her after him, "let's make tracks. You can dance some other time."

As he dragged her toward the door, she turned and glared over her shoulder, as if having to go home early was my fault. I could never understand why it was that in anything concerning Jack, Kitty blamed me if things didn't go the way she wanted.

Sue and I went back to the floor for one more dance, but Jack had destroyed the mood. We decided on hamburgers at the Spotless Spot, a drive-in far out on South Arlington near the airport. On the way she said, "Who's this Marcia Morgan?"

I told her about the case and how the Morgan woman had run off with the fifty thousand dollars belonging to her mother.

"Not that the mother is hurting for money," I said. "She's got a barrelful of it and a fancy house out on Portage Path. I guess it's just the principle of the thing."

The ends of Sue's mouth turned up in one of the pixieish smiles that set my heart aflutter. "It must be nice," she said, "to be able to lose that much money and not be upset about anything but principle."

"I wouldn't know the feeling. Probably never will."

A blonde carhop with hips swinging to the beat of a Goodman tune on someone's car radio came to take our order. When she had jotted it down and gone undulating back to the building, Sue said, "Oh, well, money isn't everything. Some things are more important than having money."

I was digging around in my pocket for the fifty cent piece I was counting on to see us through the evening. I said, "You mean like that old Crosby number, 'The Little Things in Life'? You know—a room or two is all a man and wife really need. That's a lot of baloney."

Sue laid her hand on top of mine. "Would money make the

hamburgers taste better? Or have made the dancing more fun?"

She had a point. When her fingers moved up to my wrist, then back down again, I was ready to concede. I felt the red on my cheeks, though, as I realized I had spoken of a man and wife as if it applied to us.

Paul Bauer was glum at Sunday breakfast. I had been right, his East team had lost 19-0. "No blocking," he said. "No tackling. Those softies from up in Goodyear Heights don't know how to hit."

"That's a swell attitude," I said. "If the kids from the Heights and the rest of you from down here spent less time fighting among yourselves, you might do better."

"We don't fight," Paul mumbled. "Coach Ongley would knock our brains out if we did."

I didn't argue. He was right about the slim, hard-nosed Fritz Ongley, provided he could locate the said brains. Anyway, I had something more important on my mind. I was to pick up Sue Baney in a few hours, and my wallet was tapped out. I went to the living room where he was reading the Sunday edition of the *Times-Press* and borrowed five dollars from Mr. Reimer, the retired

druggist living at the boarding house.

In mid-morning Jack Eddy rapped on the door of my room while I was napping, then opened it without waiting for an okay. I had believed he was miles away on a train. As I started a protest he cut me off with, "Can you run me out to the airport, buddy? I'm catching a plane for Denver."

"The agency's letting you fly? That'll cost big money."

"If you know a cheaper way to get there in a hurry, friend, give me the word. It'll make 'em happy at headquarters in New York. If you don't, let's shove off."

The temperature had dropped to thirty degrees overnight, a record low for the date. Jack drummed his fingers against the dashboard while I encouraged my old Chevy to wake up and live. "You'd better trade this heap before winter," he said. "Otherwise you'll be riding a lot of buses."

"It'll be okay. Just give it a minute."

"Let's take mine." He searched a pocket for the keys, then tossed them on my lap. "You can drive it while I'm away. Better take advantage of the opportunity to check the used car lots."

The engine suddenly turned over, coughed and growled a

moment, then began purring. "I told you it would be okay," I said, but let up on the clutch pedal too quickly so that we lurched away from the curb. Jack murmured something under his breath, then laughed. I handed him his keys.

The airport was quiet on a Sunday morning. The airdock where the dirigibles *Akron* and *Macon* had been built stood far out on the field like a giant black beetle, alone and empty now that its proud airships were in watery graves. Off to the left, Derby Downs, bustling with activity a month ago, had the lonely, desolate look of a circus grounds after the circus has left town.

The only activity centered on a silver airliner, one of the new Douglas DC-3's, waiting just beyond the terminal building. Jack hurried toward it, calling over his shoulder, "I'll be driving back with Marcia, buddy. See you about the end of the week."

I watched as he took the portable steps two at a time. Jack climbed stairs with the same determination he showed for climbing the ladder of success. What was it, I often wondered, that drove him to excel? I had known him for five months, yet understood little about him and knew almost nothing of his background. Now as he rushed

off to close another case he looked like a minor rubber company executive who someday would sit in the president's chair. He wasn't a big man, only five eleven compared to my own six three, yet he cut an imposing figure in his neatly pressed blue suit and the gray homburg perched at a jaunty angle on his head. He turned at the open door of the plane and lifted a hand, then was gone.

I went up to the roof where the wind was blustery and stood watching until the airliner rose into a bank of gray lake-effect clouds to the northwest. On the way back to the car I felt that emptiness that goes with seeing someone off on a journey. I would have liked to have been on the plane with Jack until I remembered that Sue Baney would be waiting.

Before Jack Eddy came striding into the *Times-Press* city room Tuesday afternoon, I had been gloomily contemplating the state of the world as detailed in the first edition. Forty people killed when the Japanese bombed Nanking. Halfway around the world in Munich, ten thousand goose-stepping German troopers paraded as the city welcomed Mussolini. More and more often in recent months I had been

picturing myself in an army uniform. The vision wasn't pleasing.

Jack looked tired yet unwilling to slow down. His greeting was, "Let's go down the street for a beer, buddy."

I stared up at him, not moving. "How'd you get back so fast?"

"Come on, sunshine, rise. I'll fill you in on the way."

We walked to Fred Gareri's place on Main Street. Under low gray clouds, the air was heavy with the stench of exhaust fumes from the traffic and rubber at the Goodrich plant a block to the south. In self-defense I lit a Spud, then passed the pack to Jack when he held out his hand.

After ordering two beers and spaghetti for himself, he told me he had returned by plane. "It was Marcia Morgan all right," he said. "No question about it, but she got wise to the shag and skipped out before I got there."

"Swell, you flew both ways on a wild goose chase. Should make you popular in New York. Now what?"

He gave a half-hearted, non-committal shrug. I had never seen him down in the dumps, but now he seemed unable to muster any genuine optimism. The waiter brought the beer and a salad for Jack. The

aroma of spaghetti sauce drifted out from the kitchen. "You're stuck, right?" I said. "You have no idea where she went?"

"Some. The man in the flat across the hall saw her get into a cab with her suitcase and a briefcase. Probably the briefcase with the money. Anyway, the cab company had a record of the trip from the building to the depot. A ticket seller remembered her buying one to Chicago."

"So she was headed back in this direction."

"It wouldn't surprise me if she's here in town."

"Why would she come to Akron, where people know her? It would be the worst place in the world for her to hide out."

"She probably panicked when she discovered we were wise to her." The waiter arrived with Jack's spaghetti, and he went to work on it as soon as the plate was in front of him. Between forkfuls, cheeks bulging, he said, "Being scared, she might head for home territory. A lot of people do that even if it is risky. You know what I mean, feeling more secure in familiar surroundings. Like a hunted animal. At least on home ground you know where to look for danger."

He pushed the plate aside and asked for another ciga-

rette. Half the spaghetti was untouched, but I didn't want to spoil my supper. Mrs. Bauer had been up making roast beef hash, one of my favorites, when I left for work a little after six A.M.

Jack blew a perfect smoke ring, then used a finger to spoil it. "Been checking the used car lots, friend?"

"I stopped and looked at the new Studebakers. Have you seen them? Pretty classy."

He chortled derisively. "Did you inherit money while I was gone? Hell, you can't afford a new car."

"I've been doing some thinking. I've never had a new car, and you get a guarantee and all that. Besides, it looks like there's a war coming on."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"We'd both probably have to go."

"And so?"

"We should have all the fun we can in the meantime."

He held a finger to his ear and circled it around, the sign of dealing with a case of insanity. "I'll remind you about the fun you're having when the monthly payment comes due, sport. These thoughts you've been getting, they wouldn't have more to do with impressing Sue Baney than living it up before some Nazi puts a bullet

through your head, would they? She's a nice piece of change, buddy, but don't go overboard."

"Look, Jack—"

He cut me off with a laconic laugh and a playful poke on the arm, the kind that stings a little. "Come on, let's amscray out of here. I'm making a run out to see Hazel Morgan, Marcia's mother. Want to tag along?"

I had work of my own to do and left him at the corner, then stood watching as he went on to the parking lot where he had left the Auburn. The liveliness seemed missing from his step. For once a case seemed to have him licked.

But as I turned and started toward the *Times-Press* building a block east, I saw him flip a coin into the upturned hat of a legless man selling pencils. Jack waved away the pencil, giving the man a grin and a few words that were answered with a laugh. Until then I had never seen the man so much as smile.

Ben Goldsmith often said there is no such thing as coincidence. There is instead, he contended, a law of nature that turns the improbable into a certainty and the impossible into a probability. Ben was a crusty city editor who didn't make a habit of philosophizing, so

when he did, I listened and in time became a believer.

That's why I wasn't too shocked when I looked over my shoulder for no particular reason and saw Marcia Morgan's face in the crowd. It was Friday night at Old Forge Field in the misty valley of the Little Cuyahoga River. November had descended upon Akron even though the calendar read September twenty-fourth. In mid-afternoon the thermometer had hit eighty-four degrees; by the time the teams came out for the second half of the football game, Sue Baney was shivering. She had snuggled against me as closely as possible. For all I cared the temperature could have plummeted to zero.

Paul Bauer and his East teammates had lost a brutal game with Central by a score of 2-0. Without the football it would have gone into the books as a neighborhood gang fight. Quarterback Bob Royle would lead the Orientals down the field, then Central would dig in and hold so that a kid named Cliff Lyons could punt the ball far upfield. It happened again and again, and from the distance he was kicking the football, I wondered if Lyons might not be a ringer brought in from the Cleveland Rams.

With five minutes left to play, one of his booming punts

grazed the East safetyman and rolled out of bounds at the goal line. The Orientals ran one play, then tried to get out of the hole with a punt of their own, but Whitey Slaninka's kick was blocked and the ball went out of the end zone for a safety.

I felt as sick as anyone on our side of the field. As always, though, the East fans swallowed the hurt and lingered near their seats to sing the Loyalty Song. The players, a motley crew in their faded gray uniforms but more recognizable with their helmets off, gathered in front of the stands. I singled out Paul. Grimy and with a patch of skin missing from his nose, he seemed on the verge of tears. Then the kids on the stands began singing and, being an alumnus, I croaked along:

*East High, we're loyal to you,
We will give our best to you.
In all our studies and play,
We'll be boosters for the Scarlet
and Gray...*

That's when for no reason whatsoever I looked around, saw the familiar face, and stopped singing.

"There she is!" I cried and began elbowing people aside. A few shoved back, others just glared. But it was a hopeless cause; Marcia Morgan had

been in the roofed grandstand and headed for the exit, I was in the bleachers below. By the time I reached ground level and then ran to the grandstand stairway, she was nowhere in sight. I hurried on to the parking lot where a row of Akron Transportation Company buses waited to take the fans downtown. Marcia wasn't on any of them, but two more of the orange buses were among the cars streaming out the gate onto North Street.

The crowd had dispersed by the time I got back to where my fruitless chase began. Sue Baney, arms wrapped tightly around her body in a vain attempt to keep warm, stood waiting alone in the damp grass. The tip of her nose was cherry red. Her smile wasn't overly warm, either, as she said, "Well, did you find her, whoever she is?"

"It was Marcia Morgan," I said. "And no, I didn't catch up with her."

For a moment she stared blankly; then, when the name registered, she said, "You mean the woman who took the money? What would she be doing at a football game?"

An hour later Jack Eddy asked the same question.

"Beats me," I said. "Maybe she likes football."

"If I'm any judge, she likes

football as much as I like toe dancing. It probably was someone who looked a little like her." That was also something Sue Baney had said.

"Dammit, Jack, it was her. Marcia Morgan, not somebody who looked like her. I'm a reporter, a trained observer."

He chuckled a little. "If you say so, buddy. Was anyone with her?"

"No way to tell. She was in the middle of a moving crowd."

"Okay, we'll go on the assumption you were right. It confirms that she's back in town. Now all we have to do is find her among a few hundred thousand people. By the way, what were you going to do if you had caught up with her?"

"Well, uh, I would . . ." Until then I hadn't thought about that. "I would have tailed her."

Jack was smirking. "Sure you would. And left Sue Baney standing in the dark after they doused the lights at the field, right? Or did you figure on asking Marcia to wait where she was while you went back for Sue?"

"You're not funny, Jack," I called over my shoulder on the way upstairs to bed.

The boarders were filing into the dining room for supper the next evening when Jack Eddy

came hurrying into the house. He was whistling something that with a little imagination could have been taken for "September in the Rain." It had been a hit earlier in the year, and now that it was September they were playing it again.

"Hey, buddy," Jack called, beckoning with a finger when he saw me at the end of the line.

I checked to be sure Mrs. Bauer hadn't started bringing things in from the kitchen, then went to where he was hanging his hat and suitcoat on the rack in the hallway. He smoothed his brown hair, already thinning on top at the age of twenty-six, stooped to check the result in a mirror, then turned and slapped me on the back again.

"Got news for you, friend. Your sighting has been confirmed, or at least it looks that way. One of our ops thinks he saw Marcia Morgan go by in a taxi when he was leaving the office. By luck another cab was in front of the hotel next door, so he hopped in and shagged her to an apartment on West Market Street."

As much as I wanted my story backed up, I was skeptical. "It doesn't make sense, Jack. Coming back to Akron when she's trying to hide out, then parading around for ev-

erybody in town to see." I swallowed my pride and said, "Maybe she does have a look-alike. You know it's not like she's a Lombard or a Garbo. I mean the best you could say for her is that she's . . . well, plain."

He gave me a poke just below the shoulder, extending the joint of his middle finger to make it sting more. "Ugly," he said, "is that the word you're looking for, friend?"

"Okay, ugly. So what did your operative find out at the apartment?"

"Nothing. He didn't try. It would have been a dumb play, buddy, nosing around on a Saturday afternoon when everything's quiet. The last thing we want to do is scare her off again, so we'll wait till Monday."

"But shouldn't—"

From the dining room Mrs. Bauer called, "Bram Geary, are you out there?"

Under Ivy Bauer's hard shell beat a kind heart, but she brooked no delay in arriving at the table. "Yes, Mrs. Bauer," I replied. "So is Jack, and we're coming."

After a lunch of five cent burgers and soggy fries on Monday I was halfway up the Bowery Street hill on my way to the police station in City

Hall when two detectives dashed out. By sprinting the last twenty yards I caught up before the man behind the wheel had started the engine of a waiting car. From the passenger's seat Plato Largis said, "Got a shooting report, Bram. Hop in back if you want a lift."

Why, I was wondering, do these things always happen on a full stomach? I thought, as I often did, of asking for a transfer from the police beat, then remembered the alternatives and again decided it was a bad idea.

Pedestrians scurried out of the way as the siren emitted its first piercing howl. We crossed Main Street, swinging wide to avoid a bus that just kept coming, and turned north on Howard past the Quaker Oats plant. Somewhere in its depths the guns rumbled as the grain was shot through underground tubes to the tall elevators up the hill on Broadway. In one form or another, the shooting rarely stopped in Akron.

We went two blocks, turned west on Market Street. Kids on their way back to St. Vincent High School from lunch stopped on the sunwarmed sidewalk to watch as we sped past. I stared back at them, suddenly feeling important.

It wasn't until we pulled to a screeching stop in front of an

apartment building that I made the connection, and then only because Jack Eddy was on the sidewalk talking to a group of elderly men and women clustered together as if seeking support. Rather than following Largis and the other detective inside I went to Jack and said, "What happened?"

His face was tense, his eyes colder than I had seen them before. "Marcia Morgan," he said. "Our man who spotted her is lying dead in the hallway outside her apartment."

"How'd you get here so fast?"

"He'd confirmed it was her and left a message for me to come out when I finished talking to a new client. It took longer than I figured. Before I got here, he went back inside for some reason and was gunned down for his trouble."

"Did these people see her do it?"

"Nobody I've talked to saw it. They sure as hell heard it, though."

I left him there and went inside, up a flight of stairs to where I could hear activity on the second floor. The Wellington operative was lying on his back, one arm outstretched, the other close to his side with the hand pressed to the wound in his chest. It hadn't helped slow the flow of blood. An old brown fedora with a greasy band lay a

few feet away; a hole showed in the outer layers of leather on the sole of his right shoe. Both socks were blue, but when you looked closely the shades didn't quite match.

Largis cocked an eyebrow when he turned to me. "A Wellington man," he said. "That explains why your friend's out front." He moved toward the stairway. "I want to talk to him. Better come along."

Instead, I got the victim's name from a uniformed policeman. I was right in thinking it was Fred Barlow, a man I had met a month earlier at the agency office. Unmarried, I recalled, a hardbitten loner whose only interest in life was his job.

I hurried after Largis but was sidetracked again when a woman of seventy or so in a faded housecoat opened the door of her apartment. In a quivering voice she said, "What's happening? Is something wrong?"

I parried the questions by asking to use her telephone. She was hesitant for a moment, then allowed me to enter. I called the *Times-Press*, gave Ben Goldsmith a synopsis of what had happened, and asked him to send someone to the police station to handle the afternoon routine. He switched me to a rewrite man. After dictat-

ing a lead paragraph, I gave him what other information was available and left it to him to pad out the story for the late editions.

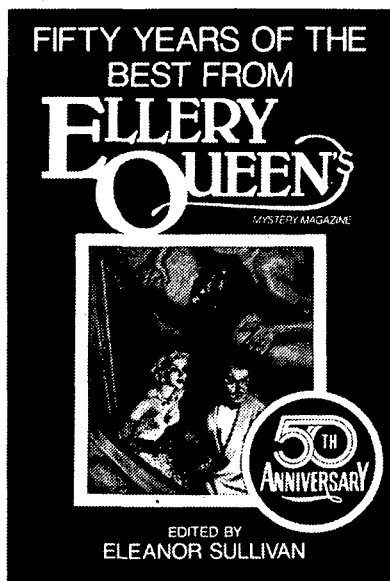
Jack Eddy and Plato Largis were winding up their conversation when I joined them on the lawn. An untended mulberry bush nearby was beginning to turn, its leaves showing the same shade of red as the puddle on the floor inside. In the pale afternoon sunlight, though, the air held the fragrance of autumn, not violent death.

The crowd had dispersed, its members lured back to their own boxy quarters by *Vic and Sade* or *Ma Perkins* or whatever soap opera was on radio at that time of day. The world of reality was allowed to intrude for only so long, then it was back to the more secure one brought to you by Oxydol or Rinso. Had it not been for Lever Brothers and Procter & Gamble, Ben Goldsmith often opined, radio would have died aborning.

Jack Eddy and I lingered on the sidewalk after Largis returned to the building. "What do you make of it?" I said.

"I'm not sure yet, buddy. Marcia Morgan was seen hurrying out right after the shots. Nobody noticed if she was carrying anything, so we'll have to see what the cops find in her flat."

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He removed his hat and began scratching his head, but not because of an itch. "Some things don't add up in my mind."

"Like what?"

"What was in it for her? She could have just walked out like she did in Denver when Barlow went to phone in."

"Maybe she didn't get wise to him until he went back."

Jack returned the hat to his head, then snapped the brim. "Yeah, maybe. Let's see what's going on inside."

The police technicians had finished their work when we reached the second floor. After placing the body on a stretcher, two ambulance crewmen in hospital whites were contemplating the steep staircase. The building custodian stood near where Barlow had fallen, shaking his head as he stared down at the stain on the hardwood floor.

The uniformed policeman who had given me the victim's name now blocked the open doorway to Marcia Morgan's apartment. He stepped aside when Largis called, "It's okay, let 'em in."

"Didn't take her clothes," he said when we had joined him in a living room sparsely furnished with cheap pieces from a second-hand store. "But that briefcase you told me about, Eddy—no sign of it anywhere."

"That's the one thing she wouldn't leave behind."

"If her mother had reported it missing in the first place, none of this would have happened."

"She did report it," said Jack. "To the agency."

"You know what I mean, to the police. And when she didn't, you should have."

"Look, that's why she hired us. Privacy is what she was after, not more headlines. And what would you have done about it if she had called you? Made out a report and filed it away?"

An angry red showed at Largis's collar and worked its way upward.

"I'll overlook that, Eddy. I know you're upset, losing one of your men this way, but don't press it too hard. As for headlines, take a gander at tonight's papers."

Even as he spoke, Tom Kennedy called to him from beyond the outstretched arm of the policeman at the doorway. My rival on the *Beacon Journal* was late, but not too late to make the night final. Knowing his story would lack some of the details I had called in, I welcomed him with a smile.

At the time of the shooting no one had been at home in the furnished flat in front of Marcia

Morgan's, the one overlooking West Market Street. The elderly bachelor in the one to the rear told Jack Eddy that Fred Barlow had been to his door. "Said he was running a routine credit check," the man said grumpily, "whatever that means. Told him I didn't know nothin' about her, never even laid eyes on the woman."

He had been in the bathroom, but had gone to his door as quickly as possible after hearing gunfire. The hallway was empty by the time he got there. "And nobody come out after that because I was tryin' to help the poor fella and I would of seen 'em."

The matronly woman in the apartment across from his told a similar story, as did a much younger one in the unit facing the street on that side of the hallway. The way her eyes roved from Jack's face to his shoes and back again made me suspect that her welcome would have been especially cordial had I not been tagging along. For the hundredth time I wondered what it was about him that appealed to the ladies.

The elderly woman directly opposite Marcia Morgan's flat was more observant than the others, or faster on her feet. After clucking her tongue she said, "Marcia went hurrying out right after she shot him. I

had just opened the door when she went running past. Didn't so much as say hello, she was in such a rush."

"Did you see her shoot him?" asked Jack.

"I didn't actually see her do it, but I was right near the door when she did." The little whitehaired lady had been smiling from the time she opened the door in answer to Jack's knock. From behind sparkling bifocals her eyes seemed to be smiling, too. "Won't you gentlemen step inside?" she said. "I just made a fresh pot of coffee."

We sat around a coffee table that was too low for comfort while she repeated the story of Barlow's "routine credit check." I was on a couch dating to the turn of the century. A huge overstuffed chair shrank Jack to insignificance, while our hostess, Mrs. Effie Loudermilk, all but disappeared in a matching rocker. Beside her was a Majestic console radio with the program schedule from the *Beacon Journal* on its top.

She caught me looking at it and said, "We don't take the *Times-Press*, but now that I know someone from there, we may switch." The warmth of her smile made me believe it.

"You live here with your husband, do you?" asked Jack.

"Oh, no," she replied, suddenly sad-eyed. "Luther was taken seven years ago come November. John and I are alone now. John's my son; you know."

She made it sound like John was still in kneepants: I was certain he had to be at least forty. I glanced around the room, expecting to find a faded photograph of Luther and a family portrait dating to the years prior to the World War, but was disappointed. The room was surprisingly free of the keepsakes normally found in the homes of the elderly. Either they were off somewhere in another room or she wasn't the type that refused to throw away anything from the old days.

My thoughts returned to the matter at hand as she was saying, "And he seemed like such a pleasant gentleman, too. Such a shame, someone doing a thing like this."

"Were you acquainted with Marcia Morgan?" asked Jack.

"Well, just to say hello, really. She was such a nice girl, too. You just never know about people, that's what I always say."

When we had taken our leave and were walking to where Jack had parked his Auburn, I said, "Such a nice girl? Doesn't sound like the Marcia

Morgan I remember. If ever there was a mean-spirited, vicious-tongued—"

Jack's raucous laughter cut me off. "I had forgotten about her calling you a slack-jawed lackey. Didn't realize you held a grudge this long, buddy. But what did you expect of Mrs. Loudermilk? She could find something nice to say about the Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run."

After supper I settled into my favorite chair in the living room and watched Bus Bauer fiddle with the knobs on his big Grunow radio, cursing under his breath because he couldn't find the George Burns and Gracie Allen show. The program wouldn't come on for another ten minutes, but I didn't tell him so. He would have made it out to be my fault.

Jack Eddy looked in from the arch at the hallway, beckoning me with his head. "Come on, buddy," he said when I was beside him. "It's time to go get Marcia."

It sounded as if we were picking her up after work. "Get her? You mean you know where she is?"

"Five will get you ten she's at the Taylor Hotel."

"What makes you think so?"

"It's a halfway decent place, but no one ever goes there. Peo-

ple from town, I mean. Makes a swell hideout."

I thought it over. The Taylor Hotel stood next to the library on Market Street, a block east of Main. The large "No Liquor" sign on the front window would keep most Akronites off the premises. Still, it seemed a wild guess on Jack's part. I strongly suspected he knew more than he was saying.

He flashed his badge as we approached the front desk. Quickly, so the elderly clerk couldn't see that it carried the name of Wellington's National Detective Agency rather than that of the Akron police department. Trailing along behind Jack Eddy had taught me that to nearly everyone a badge is a badge. That may apply to all things in life. People remember what they think they saw, not what they actually observed.

"The young woman who checked in alone this afternoon," said Jack, "what room's she in?"

The old man wasn't accustomed to visits by the law. He ran a shaky finger past all three names, two of them male, on the open page of the register, then told us the room number as if he had made an exciting discovery or found the proverbial needle. The name was Mary Smith, but it appeared that Jack had been right. That

was one of the annoying things about him, he always was right.

When the door opened to his knock, but only after he had first identified himself, it wasn't the surly, belligerent Marcia Morgan I remembered who stood before us. Instead we found a chastened, frightened girl looking for help wherever it could be found.

She nodded as if she had been expecting us and said, "So you finally got here. I didn't know who else to turn to."

She had called him. My feeling that he knew more than he had told me was confirmed. He wouldn't have risked being wrong on a hunch, knowing I would never let him live it down.

He wasted no time on preliminaries. "Let's have the dough," he said.

Marcia went to a disreputable pine dresser, opened a drawer, and removed a briefcase we had seen before. As he took it from her Jack said, "How much have you spent?"

"Just a little over a thousand dollars."

"So there's nearly forty-nine grand in here?"

"Yes."

Jack pushed his hat back on his head as he sat down on the edge of the bed. "Okay, kiddo, tell us about it."

Her story wasn't very interesting at the beginning. I could have written it beforehand and been on target. She had left home with nothing more than the clothes on her back and the briefcase. After riding a bus downtown, she caught the first train that pulled into the station and spent a couple of weeks at a hotel in Chicago. Then she went on to Denver and rented an apartment.

She recited all that in a disinterested monotone and stopped. After watching her stare at the floor for a minute or so, Jack said, "And then you got wise to our man tailing you?"

She looked up, seemingly puzzled. "Your man? No, he wasn't a detective. He was . . ." Her pasty and mottled complexion was even more pale and splotchy than usual. She wasn't a pretty sight.

"He was what?" said Jack, not trying to conceal his impatience.

Marcia gulped and said, "A gangster. I thought he was nice and really liked me, but I found out what he really was and what he was after and—"

"Hold on, hold on," said Jack, raising a hand to silence her as he got up from his seat on the bed. "Who are we talking about here?"

"That man. Tommy Arnold."

"Never heard of him. How

did you meet him?"

"At a restaurant."

"You mean a bar?"

"Yes, a bar. We got to talking and . . . well, you know."

"So what made you think he was a gangster?"

"I *know* he was. His picture was in the newspaper. Something about a trial, a hijacking case being thrown out of court. He was one of the defendants."

"Proof enough for now, I guess. Then what?"

"I left as soon as I saw the story. I took a train to Chicago and—"

"We know that. The point is, why did you leave town?"

"Because he knew about the money."

"You told him about it? When?"

"That first night." She looked down at her hands, which she had been wringing. After letting them drop to her sides she said, "He was really interested in me, or I thought so, anyway. He kept asking questions, wanted me to tell him all about myself. When I mentioned the money, he said he had connections and knew where he could double it. He said I'd be on easy street in a few weeks. The next night he was coming over to take me to dinner, and after that I was going to give him the money to invest for me."

"In what, the Brooklyn

Bridge? So you ran, then what?"

"He followed me and—"

"Had you told him you were from Akron?"

"I can't remember. I must have."

"Then why did you come back here?"

"It seemed like the safest place. I was going to give the money back but decided instead to rent another apartment. Then one day I went downtown. It was the only time I did because I didn't want anyone to see me, but I needed some things from a department store. I went to Polsky's and as I walked out the door I saw him standing on the sidewalk across the street in front of O'Neil's."

"And a bus pulled up and you got on board."

"How do you know about the bus? When it stopped, it was between us, so I ran across the sidewalk and got on."

"And ended up at a football game, right?"

"How do you know so much? Yes, and it was awful. I thought it was a regular bus so that I could ride somewhere and get off and call a cab and go home. Instead it went to this field and there wasn't a phone anywhere and the buses wouldn't go back until after the game. I was afraid to walk out on the street

in a neighborhood like that, so I had to stay. I was never so cold and miserable in all my life."

Jack was grinning. "The wages of sin. You're certain sure it was this Tommy Arnold you saw?"

"Of course I am. You don't think I'd forget someone like that, do you?"

I decided to ask a question: "If he had you scared, how come you were riding around downtown in a taxi the next day?"

"To see if he was still there, and he was. I knew then that he was watching the department stores, thinking that's where I'd show up."

"It's possible, I guess," said Jack. "I doubt if the police will buy the story."

"Why not? Who else would have killed that man today?"

"The cops think you did. You saw the paper, you know that. Give me one reason why Arnold would have shot him. And if you thought Arnold was in the building, why would you run out of your flat right into his arms?"

"I didn't think he'd be waiting after what happened. It was the best time to leave, wasn't it? I mean while he was getting away and before the police arrived."

"You don't think the cops are going to believe any of this, do

you? Or a jury?"

"It's true, so why wouldn't they? Anyway, that's not what I'm worried about right now. It's Tommy Arnold."

"If you were in jail, he wouldn't be hanging around. He'd know the money was out of reach. That is, if he was ever here in the first place."

"You don't believe me?"

Rather than answering, Jack said, "I've got to turn you in, you know that? But maybe we'll try something first. Give you a chance to prove your story, if you're game."

"What do you mean?"

"If Arnold's in Akron and he reads the papers, he knows about the shooting by now and he knows you got away. He also knows you'd probably try to skip town, so where else would he be watching for you except the railroad station? If you go there carrying this briefcase, he'll either make his play or tag along behind you."

"Jack," I said, "don't you think the police are smart enough to be watching the station for her? And that Arnold knows that?"

"Sure, but if he's the type she says he is, he won't let that stand between him and the chance to walk away with fifty grand. You're thinking like an average citizen, not an outlaw."

"But so what?" I said. "You

were hired to get the money, and you've got it. The police can look for this Arnold character, if he exists."

"You'll never understand, will you, buddy? If the police could do everything, or if they did everything they could do, the agency would be out of business. Aside from that, don't you want to be in on the finish?"

"Not if it may involve shooting."

Jack laughed. "You're forgetting something else, too. Nabbing Arnold is the one chance Marcia has of getting off the hook for Barlow's murder. Once they have her, you don't really think the cops are going to be looking for someone else, do you? Even here in town, let alone Denver."

"I get your point. But it's not what you were hired to do."

"It so happens, buddy, that I talked to her mother a few hours ago. She wants the agency to do whatever it can to help Marcia."

"She does?" Marcia said. "I wouldn't have thought she . . ." Her expression backed up her words.

"That's your big trouble, kiddo," said Jack. "Thinking is your big trouble. You don't do enough of it, and when you do, it's twisted. Your mother is a fine woman, and she loves you. Despite the grief you've caused

her for a good share of your life, she loves you."

"You believe that? Then why hasn't she acted like it?"

Jack didn't bother answering, and something in Marcia's demeanor led me to believe she no longer was as sure about it as her words indicated.

Akron's Union Station, a dingy building dating from 1891, was in a hole off East Market Street. As we drove down the incline, it appeared to be all roof. Standing on the platform gave one the feeling of being trapped under a giant cocoon. Over the decades smoke-belching locomotives had blackened the stonework to the point where the original colors could only be guessed at.

A B&O freight was lumbering by when we arrived in Jack's car. The Doodlebug, a maroon gasoline-powered coach that connected Akron with the Pennsylvania Railroad's main line at Hudson, rested on a siding. Jack parked as far from the station as possible, which wasn't far. Parking spaces for cars had not been part of the original design, and a high bluff on the west didn't allow for expansion.

Jack went inside, leaving Marcia Morgan alone in the

Auburn. I walked south along the deserted platform. When the red lights of the caboose trailing the passing freight faded in the murkiness, I turned and entered the station by a different door. A dozen or so gloomy travelers sat on wooden benches as far from each other as possible. Several men idled away the time at the newsstand, and Jack Eddy was engaging the lone ticket seller in conversation concerning train connections to Albuquerque.

I looked for the plainclothes cop I was certain must be there but didn't see any familiar faces. Any of the men at the newsstand and two slumped down on the hard benches could have been Tommy Arnold. I went to a seat affording a view of most of the waiting room, wishing I were home at the boarding house or having fun somewhere with Sue Baney.

As ordered, Marcia Morgan came through the door ten minutes behind us. The money was in a safe at Wellington's office a few blocks away in the Metropolitan Building. The well-traveled briefcase in her right hand contained only the pink and green editions of the afternoon newspapers.

I knew there was a possibility that something might hap-

pen, and yet a couple of blinks and I would have missed everything. The other loungers seemed to. As Marcia walked toward the ticket counter, one of the men from the newsstand came up behind her and neatly removed the briefcase from her hand without breaking stride. So smooth was the move that it wasn't even noticed by a second man approaching her from the other side. He took her by the elbow, flashing a badge with his free hand. The man with the briefcase went on toward the door with Jack Eddy close behind.

I watched as the detective I didn't recognize guided Marcia back to the door she had entered. After a few seconds I came to life and followed Jack outside.

By the time I reached the platform Jack had an armlock on the man with the briefcase and was pushing him along toward the Auburn.

"Woke up, did you, buddy?" Jack said as I drew alongside.

"What're you guys up to?" said the man in Jack's grip. "What's the big idea?" Jack gave his arm another twist. The man grunted.

"The cops got Marcia," I said.

"Good," said Jack. "That'll save us the trouble of turning her in. Let's get this monkey down to the office. You drive."

"Collared him, did you, Mr. Eddy?" said the operative pulling night duty at the desk.

"Red-handed," Jack replied as we continued on to the hallway leading to his office. Once there, he kicked the door shut behind us and shoved his captive toward a chair.

Jack perched on the edge of his desk with one foot dangling and the other planted on the floor, brushed off his hands, and pushed his hat far back on his head. He took a cigarette from the pack I held out to him. After I lit it for him, he said, "So how do you like Akron, Tommy?"

Arnold, rubbing his arm, stared back defiantly. "You got nothin' on me." He reached toward the phone on Jack's desk. "I'm callin' a lawyer."

Jack kicked his arm away. "This isn't the police station, pal."

"I can read signs on doors, fella. What right's a private cop got hustlin' me in here like this?"

"Just want to have a little chat, Tommy. We want to hear why you knocked off one of our men this afternoon."

Arnold grunted contemptuously. "What do I look like, a chump or somethin'? You think I just go around shootin' guys

for the fun of it, or what? I mean what reason would I have for killin' a private dick?"

Jack began nodding his head. "That very same thought's crossed my mind."

"Look," Arnold said, glancing toward the briefcase I had laid on Jack's desk, "I know what's in there and I was after it, sure. I mean who wouldn't be? But that don't mean I'd take a chance on fryin' to get it. And besides, the dame had it, not the guy that got shot. I never so much as seen her since I got in town until she showed up at the depot tonight. I wasn't even sure she'd come back here until I read today's paper, so I was about ready to give up and catch a train back home."

Jack unfastened the strap on the briefcase and showed him its contents. Arnold turned away with a look of disgust. "It was a setup all the way, huh? But tell me somethin', if I knocked off a guy to get it when there was fifty grand inside, how come I didn't make the grab at the time?"

Jack got up, stretching like a cat, then took some change from his pocket and handed me a quarter. "Go down the street and get us all some coffee, will you, buddy?" He turned to Arnold. "You take cream or sugar, Tommy?"

Arnold shook his head, and

I scratched mine. "Look, Jack, this guy has a point. I don't think it's right, running me out so you can rough him up in private."

Jack laughed. "Rough him up? Who, me? I never thought for a minute that he shot Fred Barlow. Like he said, why? The only reason I could come up with was if they knew each other from the past, if Barlow had something on him, and if they just bumped into each other accidentally in that hallway. There's a couple too many ifs in there for me."

"Then you think Marcia—"

"Get the coffee, buddy."

Sue Baney said, "All that and you just let him go?" I had called and told her I needed to talk. We met at a large Isaly's store far out on East Market near the General Tire plant. Sometimes it seemed that my entire life revolved around Market Street. Because of the numerous valleys and deep ravines that cut the town apart, it was the only street that ran the entire distance from the east to the west side of Akron.

I finished my coffee, luke-warm by the time I came to the end of the story. "Not exactly let him go. Jack turned him over to the police. Plato Largis just laughed and asked what he

was supposed to charge him with, stealing newspapers? But he kept him for questioning anyway."

"So Jack Eddy agrees with the police? He thinks Marcia Morgan killed that man?"

"I guess so. Who else is there? Look, let's talk about something else."

Sue gave me one of her pixelike smiles. She hadn't had time to get all dolled up, so her hair was a little tousled and she was wearing a plain house-dress under a short jacket. Even so she looked as lovely as ever. "Talk about something else?" she said. "I thought you needed to talk about what happened today."

"I did, and that's what we've been talking about. Now I've had my fill of it. I need a change, Sue. Let's go to a show tomorrow night, okay? Is there anything on you'd like to see?"

"*Saratoga* is at the Rialto. I missed it when it was playing downtown. Have you seen it?"

I had, but I said, "No. Who's in it?"

"Gable and Jean Harlow: It's the one they were making when she died."

"Yeah, I remember now. It's hard to believe she's dead. I wonder how they finished the picture."

"Most of it was already finished, I think, so they used a

stand-in for distant shots."

"Do you want to have dinner first at that little place next to the theater?"

She said she would. My morale shot back up where it belonged.

I was glad, too, that she hadn't picked a murder movie. I was fed up with shootings and stabbings but couldn't seem to get away from them.

Jack Eddy walked into the *Times-Press* city room the next afternoon while I was reading the ultimate shooting story, one out of Toledo. A schoolboy of twelve had shot his teacher and blamed it on reading detective stories and listening to shoot-em-ups on the radio.

Jack beat a tattoo on the city desk with his fingers as he passed. Ben Goldsmith looked up, smiling. He always smiled at good news sources, and since coming to Akron, Jack had been the best. Thanks to him, my own stock had shot up at the paper, yet I couldn't help resent the way Goldsmith fawned over him. That morning I had filed a good story loaded with inside information and in return had received only a surly grunt from Goldsmith.

After giving me a slap on the back, Jack said, "Buddy, do they have a file on public enemies in that morgue of yours?"

"I don't know if they keep one or not. Why? What are you working on now?"

"Just checking out a few ideas. No big deal."

I got up reluctantly and led him to the newspaper library, which the majority of my colleagues did call the morgue. The place where dead stories were filed away, a fount of information. But when Jack said morgue, it sounded like something out of a grade B movie.

The librarian told us there were numerous folders on public enemies. We were shown a thick one on Dillinger and another that was even thicker on the capture of Pretty Boy Floyd in Akron and his escape on the way to the state penitentiary.

Jack wasn't interested. Nor did he want to see files on Alvin Karpis, Machine Gun Kelly, or Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, but he hesitated before rejecting the Barkers—Ma and her sons Dock, Fred, Lloyd, and Herman. After all that he finally said, "How about those people from Indiana? Not the Dillinger bunch, I mean that family from somewhere around Muncie. Had connections with Gerald Chapman when he was hiding out there."

The librarian produced a file on Chapman, a crafty intellectual who had terrorized the East Coast fifteen or so years

earlier, and his cohort Dutch Anderson, a man equally skilled in the use of foreign languages or a Colt .45.

"Jack," I said, "just about all these people are dead, and not from natural causes. What kind of a case could you have involving any of them?"

He grinned over the top of the Chapman file. "Like I said, just catching up on my homework, buddy."

"On my time," but my reply lacked animosity because by then I was caught up in reading the story of Gerald Chapman's capture on a Muncie street in 1925 and then, months later, Dutch Anderson's return to gun down the man who had tipped off the police and had been a key witness at the trial. The man's wife also died in the gunfire on a sunny summer afternoon along a quiet stretch of country road. This, I knew, would come back to haunt me if the time ever came when I had to testify against a gunman and his pals.

I looked up to find Jack jotting notes on a piece of the copy paper left on the counter for use by reporters. After a minute or so he capped his pen, saw me watching, and slid a clipping over to me.

The story was a recap concerning Chapman and his gang hiding out at a farm north of

Muncie, a farm owned by the man and woman Dutch Anderson returned to kill. Off and on they had been visited by other criminals. Nasty people, all of them, including Luke McInerny and his wife Mae, wanted along with their son Tom for a series of bank stickups. One that turned sour in a small town near Fort Wayne had ended with the killing of a policeman and an innocent bystander during a shoot-out on the street.

I returned the clip to Jack, and he dropped it on top of the others in the file. "The son, Tom," I said. "You're thinking it might be Tommy Arnold? His age would be about right."

"It's one possibility, I guess." Jack thanked the librarian and guided me by the arm toward the city room. "Grab your hat, friend, and we'll take a little ride."

"Where?"

"I don't want to spoil the surprise."

It was no surprise at all when we pulled to the curb in front of the apartment building where Fred Barlow had been killed. I knew where we were headed as soon as Jack swung the big Auburn from Main Street onto West Market. It wasn't until he rapped his knuckles on Effie Loudermilk's door, however, that the idea in his mind was telegraphed to my own. With it

came a large knot in my stomach as I realized that Barlow must have had the same idea, twenty-four hours earlier.

The elderly woman didn't look as sweet and friendly as before when she opened the door. Jack wasn't expecting her to be. He was all smiles as he quickly said, "Thought you'd like to know Marcia Morgan's in jail and it's all wrapped up, Mrs. Loudermilk. I have to file a report with the home office on our man being killed, so would you be kind enough to read it over and see if your part in it is accurate?"

She thawed noticeably but didn't offer coffee when we were inside. Several packing boxes were against one wall of the hallway leading to the rest of the apartment. They gave the place an air of starkness, an empty feeling. I sat uneasily on the edge of the soft couch, but Jack remained standing. He took a folded sheet of paper from an inside pocket of his suitcoat and handed it to Mrs. Loudermilk, saying, "Is your son home today?"

She shook her head and began reading. If Jack had really written a report, this was an excerpt. She finished it in no more than a minute and handed it back. "Yes, it's just the way I told it to you. Everything's there."

"Not quite everything, Mrs. McNerny." As he spoke, Jack unbuttoned his coat and produced a long-barreled revolver from a shoulder holster. That *did* surprise me. He rarely carried a gun.

He took a quick step toward the woman before she could react. Once her arm was in his grip, Jack spun her around so her back was to him and in a loud voice called, "You can come out now, Tom. You'd better be empty-handed if you don't want your mother to get it first."

My heart had jumped up to my mouth even before the first door along the hallway was flung open and an unshaven, shirtless man in his mid-forties stepped out. He had wild eyes and a twisted smirk on his narrow face, but the nickel-plated automatic in one hand made everything else irrelevant.

I glanced at Jack as he said, "Drop it, pal, or I'll drop your mother and then you." He showed the gun in his hand, then put it against the woman's head. I expected her to say something. She didn't.

Uncertainty replaced the sick grin on Tom McNerny's face. After one of the longest moments of my life, he turned the gun toward me. "If you make your move," he said to Jack, "your friend gets it."

"That won't help *you*, sport. Be a good boy and think of mother."

Nor would it help me, of course. Jack Eddy was treating the situation like a game of chess with me as his pawn. A headline leaped to mind: REPORTER DIES IN GUNFIGHT. My thoughts skipped from that to wondering if the *Times-Press* would pay for the funeral or let them lay me away in potter's field, and would Sue Baney cry when she heard the news? At the same time, though, I was composing my lead for the final edition: "In a reckless display of bravado, an Akron private detective this afternoon captured a pair of fugitives wanted in two states for murder." Jack's name would be buried somewhere in the sixth or seventh paragraph.

In times of genuine peril it helps to have duties that keep you too occupied to dwell on your chances of survival. Before I got around to appreciating my danger fully Mrs. Loudermilk, or Mrs. McNerny, said, "It's no good, Tom. It's hopeless. You were right, we should have left everything and skipped out last night."

Her son began slowly backing away. "I'm not gonna let 'em take me, Ma."

"They haven't got anything on us, Tom. Nothing but guess-

work on this guy's part."

"He knows who we are. Even if you're right and he's got nothin' on us here, it means a one-way trip back to Indiana. That may be okay with you, Ma, but not me. I'm the one they'd strap in the chair, not a woman."

There was no exit other than the door behind us and whatever windows were at the far end of the apartment. Even so, McNerny continued to back away.

"How far will you get without a shirt, pal?" said Jack. "Even if you don't bust your butt in a dive out the window."

The hopelessness of that route dawned on McNerny. He ducked back into the room he had come from, another without a window, and slammed the door behind him. Jack started to edge toward the door to the hallway with his prisoner, then changed his mind and moved aside again.

I jumped up as soon as McNerny was out of sight, looking around for a telephone even though I had already seen that the room was without one. I did the only thing that came to mind—bolted out the door and ran to the pay phone at the top of the stairs near the end of the corridor.

Before I had finished dialing the police number, Tom McN-

erny came backing out of the flat, gun in hand. At least Jack had let him go past, hadn't shot him along the way. Once he was in the corridor, McNerny turned and ran for the stairway. If he saw me standing there, it didn't concern him. I wasn't armed, he knew that. Again I did the only thing that came to mind: stuck out a foot and tripped him as he reached the head of the stairs.

I followed him down and picked up the gun that had skidded across the floor. There was no need to hurry, he wasn't going anywhere for a while. His left leg, obviously broken, was twisted under him, and on his forehead was an egg-size lump. All he could do was lie there and moan.

“That was nice work today, buddy,” said Jack after supper at the boarding house. “Quick thinking on your part.”

I hadn't talked to him since flagging a cab outside the apartment soon after Plato Largis arrived with two carloads of policemen apparently intent on shooting someone. Along with writing a bare-bones story for the final edition in the interim, then a detailed account for the next day, I had decided against ever again ac-

companying Jack Eddy on any venture more dangerous than having a beer at the Lenox Cafe.

He had intercepted me on the front porch as I hurried off to pick up Sue Baney for our dinner date. I wouldn't mention to Sue that I had already eaten one evening meal.

"You might have warned me, Jack," I said. "I was the only one there without a gun."

He slapped me on the back, then stood with an arm draped over my shoulders. "Would you have packed one if I had?"

"You know better than that."

"Then what's your beef? Anyway, there wasn't a thing to worry about, friend. Everything was under control. I knew what I was doing."

"Yeah, sure you did. Tell me one thing: how did you figure out that sweet old Mrs. Loudermilk was really Mae McNerny, a killer?"

"One of our ops told me Fred Barlow was nosing around at the apartment Sunday afternoon against orders. That was Barlow's big trouble. He never quit working, and he was a freelancer. When he was off duty, he'd spend hours at the agency poring over old case files and wanted posters. Nothing else to do, I guess. Nothing he cared about doing.

"Anyway, after hearing he

was out there a day earlier than I had known, I checked the desk where he usually sat in the operatives' room. An old poster on the McNerny family was in the top drawer. Even the police mug shots, bad as they are, were dead ringers for the old lady. She hadn't changed a bit since they were taken a dozen years ago."

It was hard for me to believe that one man could be as lucky as Jack Eddy. However dismal the circumstances, in the end everything worked out to his advantage. I said, "Then you knew who they were before you came down to the paper pretending you were looking for information."

"I wanted a better idea of exactly what they had done. The poster didn't tell a whole lot but mentioned a tie with the Gerald Chapman gang. First I phoned a couple of places in Indiana. Didn't come up with much except that Barlow had called over there Sunday afternoon to verify that a two-grand reward was still in effect. The main thing, though, was I figured you'd want to go along for the story."

"Swell of you, Jack." I'm not sure he caught the sarcasm. "So Barlow was after the reward? But I can't understand why they'd gun him down outside their own door. They had

to know it would blow their cover."

"Probably figured he had come back to collar them on the spot. They counted on not being arrested right away once the immediate threat was eliminated. All they needed was a little time, and they'd have been long gone. Last night, if the police hadn't zeroed in on Marcia Morgan. They made the mistake of thinking it was a lucky break that gave them a breathing spell, a chance to get their stuff together."

"You too, Jack. You zeroed in on Marcia."

He laughed. "You got me there, buddy. At least until I had time to think it over. You know your friend Largis is unhappy that I didn't tip him off before we went out there."

"That makes two of us. It was a grandstand play on your part. You could have got us killed."

"Look, friend, it was an agency man who died, so that made it our business. It entitled us to the first crack. And quit your bellyaching. You got a story out of it, didn't you?"

After Mrs. Bauer's baked beans and salt pork, the meal at Grady's Restaurant on Good-year Boulevard was nothing to get excited about. Fortunately, Sue Baney seemed to enjoy it. My story of the day's events

might have kept her from concentrating on the food. She was wearing an outfit I hadn't seen before, a white blouse with a tan suit that brought out the brown of her eyes.

"What will happen to the woman and her son?" she asked.

"It's too early to be sure. Mrs. Loudermilk—I mean, Mrs. McNerny—claims she was the one who shot Barlow. She knows they won't put a woman her age in the chair. Right now it looks like they'll try her for murder here in Akron and ship her son back to Indiana."

"After so long a time will they be able to convict him?"

She was asking questions I couldn't answer with any certainty. "Depends on whether they still have witnesses, I suppose. And what kind of solid evidence they have. My guess is they'll get a conviction but won't execute him. He'll get life and be out in twenty or twenty-five years."

I enjoyed watching while she did the arithmetic in her head. After several seconds she said, "That would make it 1962. That sounds so far away. It's hard to imagine it will ever be 1962."

"I know. If I make it that far I'll be forty-eight."

She wrinkled her nose. "And I'll be forty-seven. A couple of old fossils."

"I wonder if Roosevelt will still be president."

Sue laughed and said, "Probably." Then, after a pause, "Did they release Marcia Morgan?"

"Late this afternoon. Her mother picked her up at the jail, and she's back home. I don't think it'll work out. That Marcia, she's a self-centered little . . . well, she's not a nice girl. They let Tommy Arnold go, too. And just before supper, Jack Eddy took the forty-nine thousand out to Marcia's mother, so everything is wrapped up."

"You saw him at supper? Then you must have already eaten."

"Well, uh . . . just a few bites."

Sue laughed. "That I'd have to see to believe." Then she turned serious. "I don't think you should have anything more to do with Jack Eddy. Why would he do something so crazy as he did today?"

"Because he's consumed with ambition. Imagine what they'll be saying at Wellington headquarters in New York when they hear how he caught the killers of an agency op. In his mind he had to handle the job himself."

"If he's so eager to get ahead in the world, why doesn't he get a white-collar job with one of the rubber companies? They

must pay a lot more than a detective agency."

"It hasn't to do with money, Sue. Jack's an adventurer. Business or industry would bore him to death. Even my job, I think. He'd rather be head man at Wellington's than chairman of the board at Good-year or Firestone."

"Do you really think he'll make it?"

"Absolutely, if he isn't killed first. They've already promoted him to assistant manager. Wait and see, within a year he'll be top man in Akron, and a couple of years after that, he'll be called to the home office. Once there, he'll move up the ladder in a hurry."

"Maybe you're right, but that doesn't give him the right to risk your life in the process."

"He honestly doesn't think he did. Jack Eddy believes he'll always find a way to finish on top. He'd take on a platoon of Hitler's storm troopers and expect to come out a winner. The funny thing is, he might."

I didn't mention the reward money. The newspaper wouldn't allow me to share in it, so the full two thousand dollars would go to Jack Eddy.

After glancing at the electric clock that was the highlight of the restaurant's decor, Sue

said, "The main feature starts in ten minutes. We'd better go."

While fishing around in my pocket for money to pay the check I said, "Another thing, Sue. Jack has done a lot for my own career since he came to town. It was a real break for me when he moved into Mrs. Bauer's boarding house. The word is around that Tom Kennedy's in trouble at the *Beacon Journal* because I've scooped him on so many big stories. I hope not. Tom's a nice guy, and

there's not a thing he can do about it."

Sue took my arm as we started toward the door. She looked up, giving me another of her pixieish smiles. "My honey's a nice guy, too. I don't want some daredevil getting him shot."

It was just as well that I had already seen the picture. I missed it completely the second time, lost in the glow of her words. Imagine it, a girl like Sue Baney calling me her honey.

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UNSOLVED

by
Joe Boddy

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?
The answer will appear in the December issue.*

Just an old house on Halloween night?
Keep your eyes open—look left and look right.
You'll see **the witch's face**, her **broom** and **cooking pot**,
Her **bat** and **cat**, her **skull** and **hat**, and **gravestone plot**.
Find all these and a **ghostie** too,
And you won't be afraid if he hollers, "Boo!"



See page 115 for the solution to the October puzzle.

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FICTION

A Fly on the Wall

by Elliott Capon



Pablo and Chico sat at Pablo's kitchen table and looked at all the money spread out in front of them.

Pablo's real name was Murray and Chico's real name was Alfred, but on the street they preferred to be known as Pablo and Chico. And the "street" they worked was high school and college campuses. They weren't the lowest-level drug dealers in central Florida, but they were far from the top. Very far. Still, they made a nice living, as the joke goes.

Wherever they went, they were known as Pablo and Chico, like *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci*, or bread and butter, or Amos 'n' Andy. They were never seen apart, at least not by anyone they did business with. Everyone assumed they were great friends, cousins probably, maybe even brothers. They weren't. They were business associates. Pablo, at six two, two sixty, and with an I.Q. numerically closer to his height than his weight, provided bulk and a presence that just sort of mooted the question of anybody trying to play cutesy-pie once the transaction had taken place. Chico, three inches shorter and a hundred pounds lighter than his associate, had enough brains for both of them. Together, they managed to successfully buy product from certain people, then turn around and sell it at a reasonable profit to a number of other people. They made a lot of money between them, not a fabulous amount, but a lot.

On this Labor Day, a day with the humidity standing at one hundred percent and beckoning the temperature to join it, Pablo and Chico had done extremely well. A gentleman of their acquaintance, of indeterminate South American citizenship, found himself one proverbial step ahead of the law. Consequently, he was anxious to rid himself of a quantity of product, and the first people he happened to bump into in his quest for safe and known customers were Pablo and Chico. They purchased his goods at distress sale prices and then, thanks to Chico's business acumen, managed to turn the goods around at spectacular profit to a gentleman from Japan who had come to Miami expressly for more than the dog races.

And so they found themselves, just as dusk was falling but the heat not following suit, in Pablo's kitchen gazing at a table covered with cash.

"Lookit alla dis bread," Pablo breathed.

He had, along with most of the Sunshine State's population, migrated from New York.

"Tza lotta money," Chico agreed. "A hunnert and twenny thousand bucks."

"Divided up between the two of us," Pablo said, wrinkling his forehead and half his scapula in thought, "is, uh . . ."

"Twenny-eight thousand apiece," Chico said quickly. "I'll do it." He quickly counted out twenty-six thousand dollars, piled it neatly in a stack, and handed it to Chico. Then he just shoveled the rest into a big pile in front of him and began stuffing his half into his pockets.

"Just a secon'," said Pablo.

"What?"

"Half a hunnert and twenny is forty-two, not twenny-eight." He stood up. "You tryin' to cheat me, Chico?"

"Cheat you? Who, me? Hell, no!" Chico knew that Pablo, although slow to anger, was almost impossible to calm down until his fury had been spent. And the spending of such fury would exact a cost on his, Chico's body, that would prove too expensive.

Besides, a hundred percent of a hundred and twenty thousand dollars was a hundred and twenty thousand dollars.

He took the small pistol he always wore in an ankle holster and very dispassionately shot Pablo right between the eyes as he loomed over the table.

Looking rather perplexed, and rather dead, Pablo settled down into his chair with a grunt and a sigh.

Like bacon and eggs, Starsky and Hutch, Abbott and Costello, people knew Pablo and Chico, so if Pablo showed up shot one day, it would not be too hard for someone to figure out to whom to look for answers.

Chico thought, not too long and hard because he was quite bright. He got behind Pablo and hooked his arms under the other's armpits. With great strain he managed to pull the two hundred and sixty pounds of dead weight into the bathroom. By the time he dumped Pablo on the bathroom floor he was soaked with sweat, gasping for breath in the hot, wet air. Shooting Pablo had been fairly easy, but stripping him naked filled Chico with revulsion. After all, guys don't particularly like to handle other guys who are naked and sweaty.

Still, he managed to get Pablo's clothes off and, with a great deal of exertion, got him into the bathtub, his head propped up against the back. Pablo's eyes were open, all three of them, and it made Chico nervous, but he did what he had to do. He let in the wa-

ter—comfortable bath-temperature water, in case icy cold water did something to the skin that cops would know about but he didn't and they'd know that Pablo didn't run the bath himself. He let the tub fill while he went back into the kitchen and looked for the bullet. He'd noticed a small exit wound on the back of Pablo's head and knew everything had to be right if his plan was to work. He found the bullet—a .25—on the kitchen floor, most of its velocity depleted by the journey through the thickness of whatever comprised the interior of Pablo's skull.

He went back into the bathroom and shut off the water. He dropped the bullet behind Pablo's head, watching it clonk off the rim of the tub and into the water, right where it would go had Pablo been sitting up when he'd shot himself. Then he took his pistol and wrapped Pablo's dead hand around it. The gun rested on Pablo's big thigh, fully covered by the water, which would serve to wash off his, Chico's, fingerprints. He got down on his knees and squinted, looking upwards. To his untrained eye, the entrance angle of the wound looked consistent with the scenario in which Pablo got into the tub and blew his brains (sic) out. Pablo had been standing over him, so the angle was somewhat upward; but what, were there rules on the angle one must use to shoot oneself in the head? It made sense for Pablo to have held the gun at that angle to off himself. And besides, there he was, dead as a doornail, holding the gun with the ballistics that matched the bullet that left his head and was now resting in the tub next to him. Hey, maybe it wouldn't fool Sherlock Holmes or Jim Chee into thinking it was a real suicide, but nothing pointed to Chico as a suspect and that was all that was important.

He stacked the money neatly, stowed it away carefully, and made his quiet exit from Pablo's apartment.

It took less than forty-eight hours for the neighbors to complain about the stink, and no time at all for Detective Sergeant Ron de Guerra to (a) recognize the deceased and (b) know that Pablo wasn't smart enough to commit suicide.

Lots of time on the news one hears about an arrest or a death at a "known drug site," and one wonders why, if the site is "known," it is still in business. The sad truth of the matter is, most policemen are too busy to waste their time processing the small fry, who'll be back on the streets anyway before their fingerprint cards are dry. So it was that Detective de Guerra knew Pablo and Chico, or at least knew who they were, knew how and where they operated.

Until this point they had not trod on any toes sufficient to bring them Detective de Guerra's full attention, and so he had never had the occasion to arrest or question them. But now something was amiss. Pablo, the big dummy, seemed to have decided to punch a hole in his forehead. Suicides were usually despondent, meaning they had to be suffering some kind of depression, meaning they had to have suffered some great reverses or disappointments. So far as Detective de Guerra's information had it, business for Pablo and Chico had been going swimmingly—not magnificently, but adequately, consistently. To be depressed, one had to have cognitive emotions, and as far as the good detective knew, the deceased was bereft of both emotional and intellectual development beyond that of a good-sized ficus. Not from scrupulous forensic evidence (given the workload in the greater Miami area, the loss of one Pablo had a priority somewhere below that of the winner in a largest-roach-in-Florida contest), but from a feeling deep in his cop gut, Detective de Guerra felt sure that Pablo had been helped toward the afterlife. And since Pablo was to Chico what Laverne was to Shirley, the most likely suspect was easy to determine.

Detective de Guerra watched from the door to the bathroom, deeply lost in thought, as the guys from the M.E.'s office struggled with the bloated, poorly-scented corpse. Their usual jovial jocular-ity was replaced by earnest cursing, most of it directed at the large swarm of houseflies that filled the bathroom like a living cloud. The bathroom window had been left open, allowing not only the escape of Pablo's effluvium, but the entrance of six or seven million hungry scavengers. Detective de Guerra was busy thinking about how he was going to get Chico to confess—he knew Chico was guilty, but he couldn't prove it—and seemed to be staring at the grotesque scene of man vs. corpse vs. insect without seeing it. Of course he noted it—Detective Sergeant Ron de Guerra rarely missed seeing anything—but he'd shut off his disgust-intake a long time ago so the black comedy didn't seem to bother him.

The guys were having a lot of trouble getting Pablo out of the tub, and Detective de Guerra didn't want to be there when—to be charitable, *if*—the accumulated gases in the deceased's eighth-of-a-ton of body went *blooey*. He sauntered around the apartment, stepping over the fingerprint guys and the photographers and the uniforms.

"Just another day in paradise, huh, Ron?" someone asked him, and he smiled an answer.

One of the crime scene guys had the refrigerator open. "No other victims in here, sarge," he said as Detective de Guerra wandered into the kitchen, "but look here. Evidence."

He came out with two bottles of beer in his hand. He handed one to De Guerra, made a comically grotesque face, and left the room.

De Guerra dropped into one of the chairs and snapped the top off the beer bottle. Unbeknownst to him, he was sitting in the chair from which Chico had fired his fatal shot. He tilted the bottle back and took a mouthful.

Right over the lower edge of the bottle, on the wall, was a moving black dot. Something in his cop-gut told him to take a look. He leaned over the table, unknowingly performing a mirror-image of Pablo's last loom. There was a big fat fly on the wall, just over the chair that stood opposite the one he was out of.

Detective de Guerra asked himself a question that only cops and nuts would be wont to ask. With two hundred and whatever pounds of blubber in the bathroom, with every fly south of Atlanta and north of Rio feasting in the bathroom, what was this one doing here, in the kitchen? The smell of decay was strong, so unless the fly had a cold, it couldn't not know where the main course was. Therefore, there was something here in the kitchen that was of greater interest.

Detective de Guerra knocked the fly away with the back of his hand. There was a reddish-black blob on the wall. In the heat and humidity of the late Miami summer, it was sticky and tacky. "Roscoe!" De Guerra called. One of the crime scene guys came in. "Yeah?" he asked.

Detective de Guerra pointed at the blob. "What's that?" he asked.

Roscoe leaned over the table with a magnifying glass and looked at the little blob. "It's blood, and there seem to be a couple of small hairs in it."

"Cross-match to the stiff, okay?" De Guerra said.

He left the room while Roscoe did his work.

He didn't rub his hands together, but he would have liked to. Now he had a good reason for the M.E. to take a careful look at the hole in Pablo's head. Now he could ask the FBI if he could borrow their supercomputer to see if there were anyone else's fingerprints on the wet gun. Now he had a reason to rake good old Chico over the coals. There were, documented and certified, eight thousand, six hundred, and forty-seven reasons for there to be a blob of blood and hair on the wall six and a half feet off the floor.

But the only one he cared about was the one that said someone shot someone else between the eyes.

He did other work for two days, but then he got the reports. The blood on the wall and the hair belonged to the deceased. Prints other than the deceased's were found on the gun. There should have been, but wasn't, a crack in a given tile on the bathroom wall where a bullet, no matter how small or going how slowly, should have hit had the deceased aimed and fired in the particularly awkward angle that the entrance and exit holes in his head suggested.

It wasn't enough to convict; it was enough to indict only in Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia; but it was sure enough to bring Chico in for some rigorous questioning.

Without Pablo's looming bulk to hide behind, all alone for the first time in as long as he could remember, under the intense questioning of Detective de Guerra and his own Pablo, one "Tiny" Jefferson, Jr., Chico in an embarrassingly short time cracked like an eggshell.

Chico was read his rights and was cuffed and was helped to his feet by Officer Jefferson. He remembered something he'd always seen on *Columbo* and in a million movies and said, "Detective?"

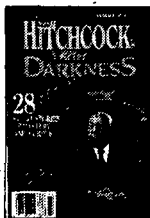
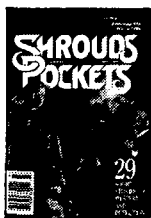
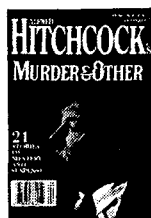
"Yes?" De Guerra asked.

"How'dja know to come after me?"

Detective de Guerra paused for a moment. "A fly on the wall told me," he said.

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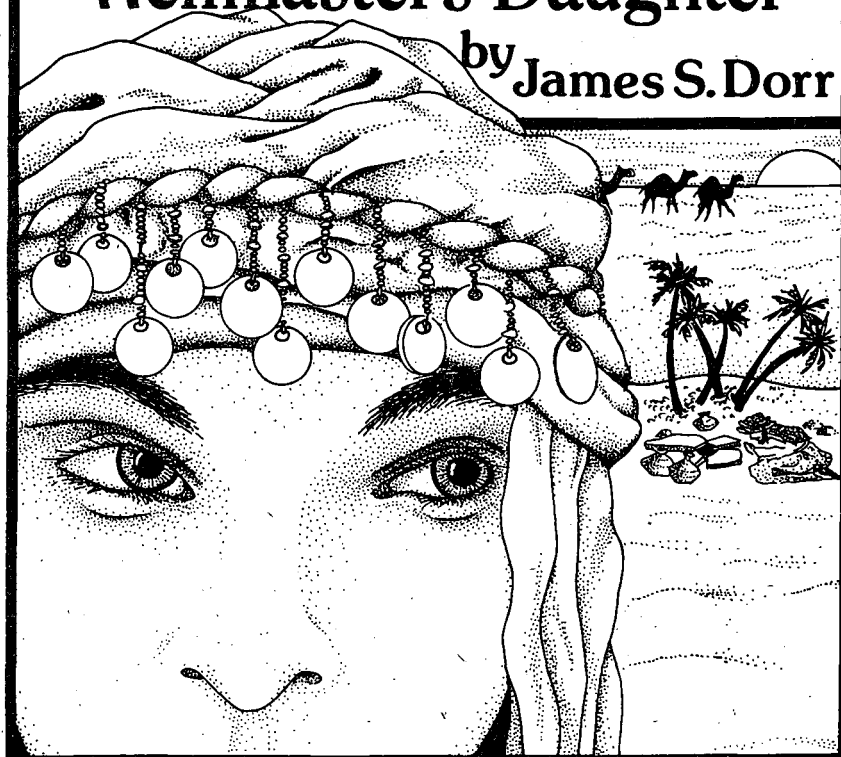
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M6GH-9

FICTION

The Wellmaster's Daughter

by James S. Dorr



Touila . . . Toufourine . . . Oum el Asel. From there, six days' journey to Bir Ounane. And who am I, who camp in this wadi, surrounded by the stinking corpses of camels? I am the master of Bir Ounane.

From there, five parched days more to El Mrait. These are the links that hold the caravan routes together—the wells in the desert within the Great Desert. These are the pearls that Allah has cast in the midst of the furnace, lest men should come to forget His mercy.

I am but a man—a just man, I think. Yet a man who has lived his whole life in the desert.

I have no mercy.

I had a daughter whose name was Zumur'rad, the Jewel of the Desert. I named her myself and, after my wife died, I raised her alone at Bir Ounane. I taught her the values of the oasis and of the desert: about the camel trains that came to us and why, when spring's briefness gave way to summer, most ceased their travel. About Allah's grace that made me a wellmaster, serving at the Caid's pleasure, and made her my daughter.

And always she would have me say more.

"Tell me, Ab'sahib"—Lord and Father—"about the sands of the Erg Sekkane," she would ask as we sat in the evening, washed in the final light of the sun. "Tell me about the crescent sands, and how they strive to mount even the rock cliffs until all is covered. Tell me as well of the great star dunes, and how they rise to reach the height of two hundred men." We would listen awhile to the faroff wind, and I would then tell her about the djinn of the trackless desert, away from even the caravan routings, and how they pleased Allah as I in turn pleased my earthly master, I by doling out water to travelers and they by proclaiming the Lord of All's might.

"And tell me," she would ask yet again, "about the wadis. Tell me about the phantom rain." And again we would listen and I would explain why the desert grows hot—so hot in summer that when storm clouds come, such rain as they carry boils back to the sky before reaching its surface. And how the wadis—the burnt remains of what once had been rivers—thus stay bone dry until a second cloud follows the first, discharging *its* water onto a ground that, even if thirstier now than before, at least has been cooled enough to receive it.

And so we would often continue to sit the entire night through, I speaking, she learning, beneath patterned stars so bright one could touch them.

We spent our time that way until her twelfth spring.

I have met the Caid. He has a palace near the ocean which he departs from only twice every fourteen years. On one of these journeys he visits his cities along the rivers and by the sea, making sure they are garrisoned strongly, while on the other he enters the desert.

On this second journey, seven years after the first is completed, he visits the wells. He checks to be sure that his commerce is flowing—to see with his own eyes that what his soldiers, who visit the wells every two or three seasons, have told him is true. It is on this journey that he makes sure that tools and seed, and fresh, healthy camels, and such other things the wellmasters need to tend their oases are being supplied. It was on this journey that he met me.

My daughter had scarcely known five springs when the Caid arrived at Bir Ounane. She does not remember the way he greeted me like a friend. The way he confirmed me as his wellmaster and later, as we drank tea together, told me that when he arrived again, in fourteen more years, he would see that Zumur'rad had a husband.

She does not remember the way we spoke of many things in the perfumed shade of the Caid's pavilion. And so she would ask me, when she became twelve:

"Sahib," she would say, "tell me about the Caid's palace beyond the desert. Tell me about the cities he visits, and what the ocean is like that he lives by."

And I would tell her what he told me, about the djinn of the ground and the water. I would explain how, in parts of the world, the water lies beneath rock and sand—as it does in our desert—but yet, in other parts, through Allah's mercy, these djinn change position.

"And this is what the Caid called the ocean?" she would ask further. "This changing position. How can such things be?"

"For Allah," I would say, "it is as easy as blinking one's eye." I would have her be silent and we would listen to the earth's murmur beneath the sand, and then I would tell her how rivers of water flowed under the ground, to feed wells such as ours. But elsewhere,

such rivers flowed on the surface, and fed not wells, but vast basins of water that stretched as far as man could see.

I would repeat what the Caid had told me, about dunelike waves that moved through the water, about dustlike ripples that washed on the shore. I would tell of the storms, when the djinn of the air fought those of the water, and how they were feared more than even the storms we knew in the desert—the storms where sand would sweep up to the sky and the sun's face would blacken. And she would weep then.

"Tell me not about storms on the desert," she would say, "nor about an ocean that frightens me more. Tell me instead about the gardens. The cities where the caravans come from and where they go. Tell me about the things of beauty."

At those times I would wipe Zumur'rad's tears away on the hem of my own sleeve. I would then describe, in a gentle voice, how the caravan routes came out of the desert into a land filled with trees and flowers, no matter what season. How birds would sing when the camel drivers arrived at a river, and how that river would flow to the ocean, its waters sweeter than even the honey the caravans' merchants sometimes gave to her when they passed by us. I would describe to her how, where the water was at its sweetest; men built vast cities of emeralds and gold; and how they built palaces out of marble as white as milk, with roofs and domes and turrets so thick the sun couldn't reach through; and how the air within these great halls was at all times as cool as the water of Bir Ounane in the first days of springtime.

Zumur'rad would smile then.

By Allah's grace, the world lies in layers. Layers of sand over layers of water. Layers of heat. Even the phantom rain is a layer—a layer of promise above the dry desert. A promise fulfilled with the second rain.

And so, in this wadi, I bury my camels beneath the sand. I have little strength—my leg has been wounded and even now festers—but I do not have to bury them deeply. A hand's-breadth or two beneath the surface, the ground is cool enough for insects and worms to burrow. A hand's-breadth of sand sprinkled over the corpses protects from the sun.

I work on my knees. When my work is completed, I dig a trench, also, to fit my own body. A place I can lie in relative coolness, conserving the moisture that keeps me alive.

By Allah's grace, thus might I endure forever.

I think about layers—how even a child's growth is patterned in layers. How even trade changes. When Zumur'rad reached her fifteenth spring, the nature of the goods that came by us was different from what it had been in past years.

Where once the caravans had carried iron tools from the north, and brought back ivory and spices, many now carried weapons for trading and brought back slaves. And these were larger than most camel trains. As well as the camel and caravan-masters, the boys—apprentices—who swept dung for the evening fires, the cargomaster when one was needed, the slavers' caravans also had guards.

In part for this reason, the slavers were shunned by those who knew more of the ways of the desert. In part they were shunned because slaving is evil—because Allah punishes those who would deal in their fellow men. And yet they continued.

So worried was I about these changes I did not realize that the nature of Zumur'rad's questions had changed as well.

This time she asked: "Why is slaving evil? Why, if the slavers gain riches from it, do others insist that Allah disdains it?" And I tried to tell her about men's suffering, and death in the desert. About the maltreatment of human cargo by men who sought too great and too fast a profit.

I tried to explain this by telling her stories—unpleasant stories—of Allah's wrath. Of one caravan, in ancient times when they carried slaves, too, that was led by inexperienced masters into a sandstorm, cargo and all; and how, unlike the storms of the Caid's ocean, this storm sucked it dry. How it stands to this day in the Erg Iguidi, beyond the well of Oum el Asel, as a silent warning, its camels and slaves and guards and drivers all turned into statues. Their flesh hard as stone.

And I told her that these were the fortunate ones—in Allah's mercy, their deaths were at least swift. That there were other caravans whose masters allowed their camels to sicken until, still days from the nearest well, they could go no farther . . .

And she interrupted. "Tell me not about death," she said, "but about those who live to enjoy the riches they gain from such cargo. Tell me about the things they buy, the places they live, when they have enough wealth, far away from the desert."

I looked at her when she asked these questions, and saw, for the

first time, how much she had grown. I tried to explain how Allah punishes, in the long run, *all* who traffic in evil. She would not listen.

"Tell me," she demanded instead, "why the Caid wishes to stop the slave trade." I had no answer—I had not known.

I asked her how she had heard such things and she answered with yet another question.

"Tell me about men."

Spring had ended. Summer was on us and, because of the heat of the season, all caravans had ceased their travel. And so I told Zumur'rad about men.

I told her of the Caid's promise and how, if she would be patient for only a few years more, a man would be found who would be worthy of her. She would have a husband, and I a partner to help in my old age. And yet she defied me.

"I will not wait for your Caid's man," she said when I had finished speaking. "I have gotten a lover already. His name is Bes'fariq and he is the leader of one of the largest slave caravans—it was he who told me about the Caid. And when we are married, unlike the man *you* would choose for my husband, he will not force me to stay in the desert."

Spring had ended. The wind had shifted, the burning wind from the south combating the final remnants of air from the north—from the Caid's ocean. This was the time when such clouds that were seen—high, mist-like wraiths above the Hamada, the rock-crowned plateau that separates the Erg Sekkane from Oum el Asel—produced sudden downpours but no lasting rain. When the true water that comes to the desert, through layered rock underneath the dry courses of ancient rivers, had slowed to a trickle.

This was the time when even the sparse green jewels of Allah—the wells that break through the desert's surface—have seen the grass that surrounds them turn yellow, the flowers die, and the trees fold their leaves, and so there was little that I could do but pray that one of the Caid's supply trains would come in the fall. I would then send Zumur'rad north to his palace in hopes he could find her a husband right then—even a husband who would not wish to apprentice himself to me at Bir Ounane. But there were no caravans that fall, nor during the winter or early spring of the following year.

Until, finally, Zumur'rad was sixteen.

Again, spring was ending. Again the winds battled when, out of the north, from Oum el Asel, a caravan came. Zumur'rad ran out with a dipper of water to the lead camel, offering it to the rider who swung down. The water consumed, the rider took Zumur'rad into his arms and kissed her as if they had been long married, then brought her back to me.

"Old man," he said, "my name is Bes'fariq. You may as well know that I deal in slaves."

"I have seen you before," I answered. "In past years I have given you water—that is my job. But is it not too late in the season for seeking slaves? Or do you intend to spend the whole summer south of the desert, and bring your cargo back in the fall?"

The rider turned and conversed with Zumur'rad, speaking in whispers, then motioned to his fellows to dismount. "It is late in the evening, old man," he finally said when he turned back to me. "My men are thirsty and need to be fed. We will leave in the morning."

"To spend the whole summer south of the desert?" I asked again. I looked at my daughter, pressed close to his side, and purposely spoke in mocking tones. "Slavers spend weeks to gather their cargoes—even such prosperous slavers as you—and by then it would be too hot to cross back with such a burden . . ."

"Not to spend the summer, old man," Bes'fariq said, his voice rising in anger. "Nor to seek slaves—at least not for this journey." He paused and twisted again for a moment, to ask a question of one of his men, and Zumur'rad continued.

"There has been a war," she said—she did not call me Lord and Father. "Your Caid attempted to put down the slavers, and they have revolted. Bes'fariq goes south to join an army that's already gathered at El Mrait, to bring it back north . . ."

"To bring it back north, with the first heat of summer, and push the Caid into the ocean," Bes'fariq added, again at her side. "We will ride on the edge of the wind, old man. At the very end of the caravan season, stopping only to refill our waterskins, in order to strike when we're least expected." He lowered his gaze and looked at Zumur'rad, then back to me.

"And she will ride with us."

"No!" I shouted. I pushed myself between him and my daughter. Grappled with him. Saw—from the corner of an eye—the hot flash of metal.

I twisted and lunged—felt pain sear my thigh.
And looked at my daughter. Saw how she had stabbed me.
I had no daughter.

I looked at the knife. Looked up at Zumur'rad from where I had fallen.

Watched as the blood—the water and flesh that had bound us together—dripped from her hand.

I wake in the desert, stiff in my trench, my nostrils filled with the odor of half-rotted camels—the three already sickened camels Bes'fariq gave me. I heard him talking when I woke *that* morning at Bir Ounane, discussing the camels with the man he had questioned before. I woke in the hut where I keep summer fodder for my own beasts and heard Zumur'rad join their conversation. It was she who suggested the camels be given to me.

"He fears the desert," she told Bes'fariq. "He fears the slow dying. Therefore, let him ride one of these as far as it takes him. Let him have the others as well. You have no need for them."

"That is true," her lover replied. "The ones we have gotten at Oum el Asel, plus the ones we have here, will be more than sufficient. But what if he does not go into the desert? What if he stays here, where there is at least water?"

It was Zumur'rad who kicked the door open and looked down at me where I lay on the ground. She inspected the wound she had given me the night before, looked approvingly at the signs that it had already begun to fester.

She nodded and turned back to Bes'fariq. "Give him a shovel before he sets off—he has several here that he uses to clear the well after sandstorms. Give him a choice. He may go into the desert and dig his own grave, or, if he stays here . . ."

Bes'fariq cut her off with a laugh. "Or, if he stays here," he finished for her, "I will kill him when we return, more slowly than even the desert might kill him, and cut his body into pieces. I will then strew them across the desert, so widely that not even Allah will find them to bring them to heaven. If that is your meaning, then you *are* worthy of me, Zumur'rad."

I raised my head. "You would desecrate my corpse?" I asked. "What kind of mah are you?"

"Then you have heard what we said, old man—you know what is expected. As for me, I am a strong man. A man who takes from wellmasters like you. Do you understand me?"

"You have taken from *other* wellmasters?" I whispered my horror. "*You would blaspheme Allah by raiding His gardens . . .*"

"You do understand me. We leave as soon as our camels are saddled. In five days' time we will reach El Mraitai and join with my army. We will rest one day, then make our return, arriving back here on the eleventh day after this morning. Do you see those clouds?"

I looked out the hut's door to where he pointed and saw wisps of cloud high above to the north. Empty clouds, but when one sees the first whiteness, he always hopes that others may follow. I did not speak but only nodded.

"Good," he said. "Those clouds will have long disappeared when eleven days have passed. You will be like those clouds—do you understand me?"

I nodded again. "You will leave water bags and food—my knife and my clothing—along with a shovel and three dying camels. Enough to allow me to get as far, perhaps, as the Hamada before the beasts perish."

"You do understand me," he said as before. He smiled and put his arm around Zumur'rad's waist, and led her outside to where his men waited.

Ten mornings ago I left Bir Ounane. In two days' time I reached this wadi and slaughtered my camels, then made my camp. I buried my camels, the better to let their flesh grow putrescent. Away from the drying rays of the sun.

I dug my own grave.

I lie in it this morning, the stench of my camels assailing my nostrils. It vies with the rot of my own wounded leg, a rot that has long since spread itself into the rest of my body. I lie and wait, gazing north toward the Hamada, where new wisps are forming.

I think about layers. And second rains.

The phantom rain already fell this morning, boiling the stench and the rot into steam. The morning before Bes'fariq's army is due to return, weak with thirst from its own desert journey.

I think about layers—I dreamed of my daughter last night while I slept.

Except I have no daughter.

I look at the sky.

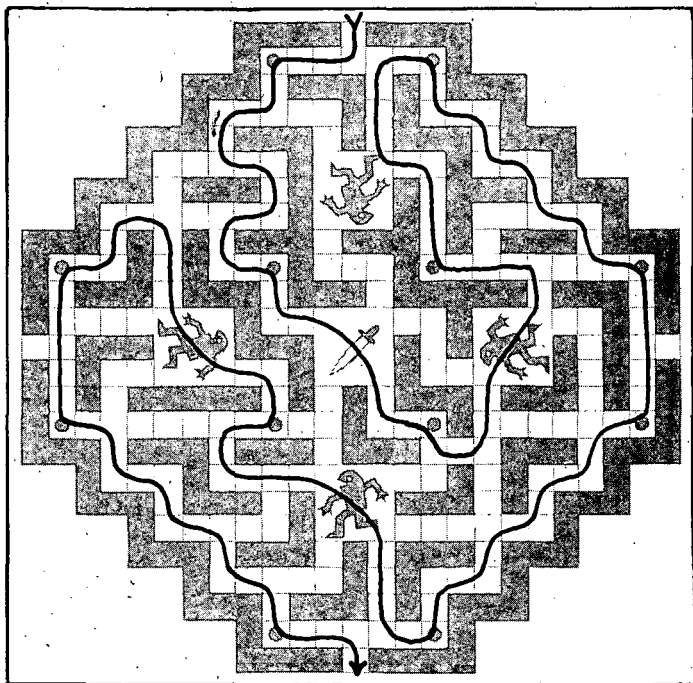
And the second rain hisses above the Hamada—it ends in moments, but this time the ground has been cooled to receive it. To

let it puddle and gather and swirl on the rocky plateau. To spill into the wadi . . .

I hear a humming, still far in the distance—the sound that water makes moving on sand. A trickle, a flood, that will take my life's spirit—the rot of my body, the stench of my camels, the poison and death that Zumur'rad left to me.

And give it all unto the thirsty djinn who, by Allah's grace, lie under the wadi, jealously guarding the ancient course that feeds the well of Bir Ounane.

SOLUTION TO THE OCTOBER "UNSOLVED":



NOTE: The solution to the August "Unsolved," published in the September issue, was incorrect. The correct answer was that C is guilty. —ED.

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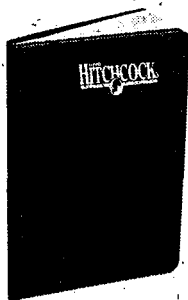
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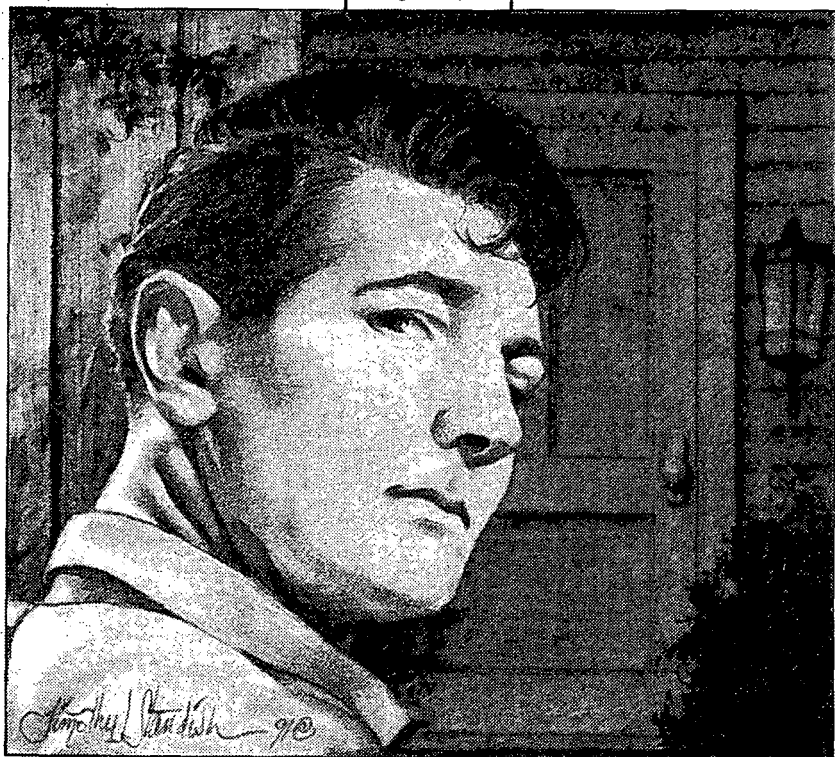


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FICTION



—The Dealers—

by Greg Goldsmith

In Private Eye Heaven all my clients will be rich, beautiful, and generous, and I'll solve every case by proving their innocence.

In the meantime, I've got to make a living, and when a criminal case comes my way, it usually means I'm going to be on the losing side. That's probably a good thing because when a criminal case comes my way it also usually means I'm working for a guy who should be occupying a prison cell so he can't be out breaking into old ladies' houses or brutalizing his girlfriend's kids.

I'm Jess McBain, and I do business as McBain Confidential Investigations—Confidential because I figured it would look good in the Yellow Pages and attract the suspicious-spouse business. It worked well enough, and the suspicious-spouse business put me at the same trough with the lawyers. The lawyers noticed me hanging around, and they started coming up with all kinds of jobs for me, including criminal cases.

On a cool Tuesday morning in late September, Dick Frankton, a lawyer I'd worked with a few times, called for help on a case. What surprised me was that it was a criminal case—a murder case at that.

Dick didn't do much criminal

work. Though he was competent as lawyers go, his court cases usually involved clients who hadn't noticed the Jr. at the end of his name. His father, Richard Frankton, Sr., had been a criminal lawyer of some distinction, but that had meant going into the barrooms and alleys of the world. His son rarely dealt with the less-genteel ninety-eight percent of the population.

Except for me, I guess.

Members of the other two percent, when they have need of a lawyer, sometimes don't stop to consider that the guy who did a good job on a divorce or a business contract might not be the one to keep them out of jail. A lot of lawyers would set the client straight, but just as many have egos that let them take on cases that might just as well involve brain surgery.

Dick had a gorilla of an ego.

The case he called about had made the top of the front page of that morning's *Clarion*.

INDUSTRIALIST'S WIDOW
SLAIN; HUSBAND JAILED

After a headline like that, you have to read the story.

A prominent local woman was found beaten to death early Monday morn-

ing in her fashionable northwest area home, and her husband has been arrested and charged with murder.

Elizabeth Garver, 52, died of multiple blows to the head, according to Coroner Richard Mavins, who performed an autopsy Monday afternoon.

Mrs. Garver's husband, Vincent Garver, 37, was arrested at the scene. He was to be arraigned this afternoon on a charge of first degree murder.

Jack Blanchard, chief investigator for the county prosecutor's office, declined to give details of the crime, but police sources say they have confiscated a brass lamp, which they believe to be the murder weapon.

The sources say Garver was highly intoxicated when they arrested him. They offered no motive for the slaying, but said that police have been to the Garver home before to deal with incidents of domestic violence and substance abuse.

I wondered if it was a cop or a reporter who came up with "domestic violence and substance abuse" instead of "drunken wife-beating."

Mrs. Garver was the widow of Franklin Weaver, founder of Mid-States Auto Parts, one of the nation's leading manufacturers of automobile motor mounts. Mr. Weaver suffered a fatal heart attack in 1982.

Mrs. Weaver sold the company to Detroit-based Consolidated Industries soon after her husband's death. She married Garver in 1984.

The rest of it was more obituary stuff, including a lot on what a great guy her first husband had been. Until a couple of nights earlier, Garver apparently had accomplished nothing worthy of mention in the article.

"Looks like a great prospect," I told Dick, not trying to keep the whine out of my voice. "Drunken, brutish fortune hunter holding a one-way ticket to a little room. Maybe even a little room with a big chair. What do you want from me?"

"Hardly anything. I just need someone to go over the police reports, maybe find me something to bargain with."

"Bargain, huh? Is your guy ready to plead?"

"Him? Not hardly." I could hear the shudder in his voice. "But I think a few more days of

sobriety and a soothing explanation of the difference between murder and voluntary manslaughter will bring him around. He doesn't even know what happened. He remembers drinking, arguing with his wife, drinking some more, arguing some more, and waking up in the back seat of a police car."

"He'll make a wonderful witness. What do you expect me to find?"

"Nothing, really. To tell you the truth, I would have saved the client the cost of an investigator, but he insisted he wanted the deluxe. I just thought I'd put you in my debt by giving you a do-nothing job at good pay."

"Speaking of debts and pay..."

"Look, the guy's in jail."

"Dick, just because it's you, I'm going to give him a special deal. He's got forty-eight hours to come up with seven hundred fifty dollars for my first three days' work. Just don't tell anybody."

Dick knew that I normally demanded my money three days in advance from people who had the money. Since he was doing me a favor, I decided to do him one. I just didn't want to establish a precedent. Lawyers are great for remembering precedents. If they screw you

once, they'll screw you every time.

I maintain my one-man-plus-answering-machine office in a ten room nineteenth century house that I also call home. I can afford to live in a semi-mansion because my neighborhood is not the best. By that I mean the streets aren't safe from noon, when the early-rising muggers are getting out of bed, until dawn the next day, when the last of them has given up.

On the opposite side of town, several miles and a couple of digits in median income away, was the Garver home, a Tudor affair at the dead end of a heavily commercialized street that had somehow penetrated the upper-crust neighborhood on the north edge of town. Car lots, fast food restaurants, and shopping plazas had just about eaten up Wheaton Road. A wooded five acres buffered the Garver house from the bank branch and the grocery store that had become the next door neighbors.

I had arranged to meet Jack Blanchard, an investigator for the prosecutor's office, at the murder scene. I think he was cooperating so willingly on this case because he was amused at the thought of somebody's trying to muddy a transparent case of spouse extermination—a common type of mur-

der. He had a key, and we went in.

"We found her in there," Blanchard told me, gesturing through french doors to a sitting room big enough to host a half-court basketball game. Yellow crime-scene tape was strung across the doorway, and I could see an eighteen inch stain that no doubt had ruined the Persian rug. Blanchard told me that a brass table lamp had been found on the floor about five feet from the body. He said lab tests had shown that the two had come into violent contact at least three times.

"The third time might be the charm we need to warm up Ol' Sparky for Garver," he said cheerfully. "That pretty well puts it into the category of a purposeful killing. Sure not any kind of manslaughter."

Blanchard was working on a plea bargain, too.

"Any prints on the lamp?" I asked.

"Nah. Just some smears."

We moved down the hallway to what was obviously Garver's den, where Blanchard said they had found the new widower. It was almost as big as the sitting room. The furniture was all heavy wood and overstuffed leather. A huge television screen dominated one wall, and the others were adorned with dead animal heads and racks of

rifles, shotguns, and handguns.

I figured I might as well get into the plea bargaining act.

"With all this heat around, why would he pick a piece of furniture for a weapon?"

"Maybe he wanted to make it look like a burglar did it. Won't work, though. Doors were locked, windows were bolted, and the alarm company said they got nothing."

"Didn't try very hard on the burglar plot, did he?"

"Aw, who knows the mind of a drunk," Blanchard shrugged. "He was so plastered he didn't even wake up when we pulled him out of that chair and dragged him out to a cruiser."

"Which chair?"

"The one facing the TV."

"You mean he beats his wife to death, then plops down to watch the late movie? This does not seem like a master criminal at work."

"Have you seen enough?" Blanchard asked in a tone that said I had seen enough.

"Okay. Just let me get a couple of pictures here and in the other room."

I whistled and fiddled with my Minolta while Blanchard fidgeted and checked his watch. Jack had been an investigator on the local police force for twenty-five years before retiring and joining the prosecutor's staff. He considered the prose-

cutor his client, just as Garver was mine, and he tended to ignore things that would make things difficult for his client. Still, he was a good cop and played fair, not hiding evidence or making it up as some did.

His boss, Prosecutor Kate Irwin, made sure of that. She was as tough as they come, but she took her oaths seriously and came down hard on cops who tailored the facts to make them fit their favorite suspects.

"Met your client yet?" Blanchard asked as we left the house.

"Nope. Frankton told me he'd arrange for me to talk with him at noon. They're going to court at one thirty."

"McBain," Blanchard said, "you are in for a treat. After you have a chance to talk with him, let me know how innocent you think he is."

Like most cops, Blanchard was making the mistake of thinking it was important to me that Garver be innocent. My job was to help Frankton keep him from being found guilty—at least not as guilty as the prosecution said.

As the case lay at that moment, I was satisfied that there was no way they could burn Garver on a capital murder charge. Despite Blanchard's posturing, everything pointed to a spur-of-the-moment killing

committed in a drunken rage. To go for the death penalty, the prosecutor would have to show that it was a hired killing or a multiple murder or that it had some feature that separated it from garden variety homicide.

It looked like a simple family killing, and the only question would be whether Dick could chop it down from murder to voluntary manslaughter. To Garver it meant the difference between spending virtually the rest of his life in prison or getting out before he was forty-five—certainly before he reached his late wife's age.

"Who found the body?" I asked Blanchard as we moved to our cars in the circle driveway.

"Maid," he said, getting into his car. "She lives over the attached garage, and about midnight she hears this commotion downstairs. Pretty soon it stops, and she comes down to assess the damage. Garver's beat up his wife before, and the maid wants to see if the lady needs attention. She finds the corpse and calls the police. They come out and find Garver. They call me, and here we are."

"Thanks for the tour," I said, looking at my watch. "I'd buy you lunch, but I'm due at the jail in five minutes."

"Your client will wait," Blanchard said. He laughed

and drove away. I headed for the jail. When I got there, I heard the sound.

I've heard it hundreds of times, but a cell block door slamming behind me always puts my neck hair on end. Jails are made of steel and concrete, and they're polished and scrubbed every day, and they're always filthy. Closed circuit television cameras have replaced peepholes, but jail cells are still nothing but dungeons for storing human refuse until someone decides how to dispose of it.

Besides the buzzes and clangs of electrically operated doors being opened and shut, the only sounds in a jail are complaints from the guests and the laughter of policemen. Cops seem to like hanging around jails, probably because they can leave whenever they want—like sticking your hand in a flame and pulling it out before you get burned. Cops like to taunt.

The other prisoners were eating lunch, but my client was pacing in his cell when a jailer let me in. At thirty-seven, Garver was a college football player gone to lard. At six foot three he could buy clothes that disguised that fact, but his flabby chest and belly made pillows in the blue jumpsuit the jail had issued him. His blond

hair was uncombed, his mustache was shaggy, and he hadn't been shaving. He was also in a bad mood.

"What the hell you mean I can't get out? I've been in this pigsty for two days. What the hell am I paying you and Frankton for?"

I took a deep breath and quietly explained that murder was not aailable offense and that the judge would explain all that to him during the arraignment.

"Who the hell said it was murder? How the hell can it be murder if I was drunk?"

I wondered how many times he had said he was sober when he was drunk. Now he wanted people to think he had been drunk. I told him it didn't make any difference to the prosecutor if he was drunk or sober when the killing took place. Voluntary intoxication is not a defense to a murder charge.

"But if I didn't know I was killing her, isn't that like temporary insanity?"

He was whining even before he finished that one, but the bluster was back when he jumped to his feet and shouted, "Wait a minute. I don't even know for sure that I did it. It could have been her boyfriend. Or her daughter. She has a key to the house."

Evidently that was the first

time he had entertained the possibility that he hadn't killed his wife. The idea seemed remote to me, too, but I agreed to check on it. I was particularly intrigued with the boyfriend. He gave me the name Justin. Robert Justin. The daughter I remembered from the obituary as the only child of Franklin and Elizabeth Weaver. Name was Lisa something.

As I left, Garver reminded me that I was being paid plenty to get him out of there.

Another guy who didn't understand my job.

From the outside, a jail door slamming behind me sounds like the recess bell. I was enjoying the sun in my eyes when Frankton came strolling down the block on his way to talk with Garver about his first day in court. "Having a nice day?" he chuckled.

"He's all yours for the rest of it," I said and asked him about the boyfriend angle.

"An old rumor. Supposedly there was something going on between Elizabeth and Robert Justin, the real estate developer. I have no idea if there's any truth to it."

I asked about the daughter.

"Lisa George, Elizabeth's daughter by her first marriage. What do you want to know about her?"

"Well, our client offered her

as a substitute murderer."

Frankton snorted. "I've known her for years. Handled her divorce. She's a bit cold, and that turns off a lot of people, but she's no killer."

"Know where I can find her?"

"Killbuck Condominiums on Riviera Drive. No, wait a minute. She goes to an exercise spa just about every afternoon."

"The day before her mother's funeral?"

"Lisa's a pretty strong individual," he said with a half smile. He was obviously an admirer.

The Some Body Club was in a concrete block building on Wheaton Road, about a mile south of the Garver house. As gymnasiums go, it was a tea room. It smelled more of talcum powder than sweat, and some of the designer outfits on display cost more than Sugar Ray Robinson made for most of his fights. Just inside the doorway was a grouping of chrome and vinyl furniture that served as a reception area. From there I could watch the workers-out as they pedaled their bikes to nowhere or pumped their iron or just stood around posing in front of the mirrored walls.

A muscular "instructor" with good hair agreed to tell Lisa

George she had a visitor. When she stepped into the reception area, it was like someone turned up the air conditioning. She certainly looked "a bit cold." Like a six foot snow queen. Her eyes were blue ice, and her lips were tinted to match. Her shoulder length blonde hair was held back by a pale blue sweat band, and her form-hugging sweatsuit was snow white.

"Jess McBain," I introduced myself. My mouth had gone dry. "I'm helping Dick Frankton investigate your mother's murder."

"Trying to get that pig Garver off, you mean."

Her voice was deep and flat and carried not a hint of bitterness. The corners of her mouth turned neither up nor down, and she didn't glare or frown. She did not offer to shake hands. Cold.

"I'm just trying to find out exactly what happened," I said. "Before we plead him guilty, we want to make sure the wrong person doesn't take a fall while the real killer gets away."

I had hoped that the idea that I was planning to help put her stepfather in prison would get me on her good side and that bringing up the idea of the killer's getting away might get her to offer some alternatives.

"Don't give me that crap. That drunk beat her up before. She told me. He just went too far this time. I hope he burns."

I decided a different tactic was in order.

"Garver says you have a key to your mother's house."

It took her by surprise.

"What are you insinuating? That I... I can't believe Frankton would let you..."

"Like I said. I'm investigating. You do have a key?"

"Of course I do. I suppose now you want to know where I was Sunday night."

"Well?"

"I was home in my apartment."

"Alone?"

"No. And it's none of your business who."

She had heated up for a few seconds there, but the frost was back.

It turned to dry ice when I asked, "You know a guy named Justin?"

"He and my mother had a business relationship."

Her lips moved, but I don't think her teeth did.

That was the end of the interview. She turned and walked away from me slowly, as if she expected me to reach for her and give her the chance to use some judo move she had in mind. I just enjoyed the view.

* * *

Robert Justin's office was on the east side of town in one of those five story steel and smoked glass cubes that grow near expressway interchanges. Actually, his office was the building—the Justin Building, home to Justin Enterprises.

No, I told the receptionist, I didn't have an appointment, and yes, I realized that Mr. Justin wouldn't like having his meeting interrupted, and please, would she just tell him it's about Mrs. Garver. She whitened and blushed at the same time, then turned away and whispered something into her phone. She hung up and told me Mr. Justin would see me in a few minutes. She concentrated hard on the afternoon mail.

Justin was out in one minute. He escorted me down the hallway, through his secretary's office, and into his own, a corner of the top floor with two glass walls. He had views of another five story cube and of the expressway.

Justin certainly didn't seem like a rich lady's boyfriend. He was about fifty, tall and skinny, and had bad breath. And he was loud. When he hailed me in the lobby I assumed he was just a noisy greeter, but I soon realized that his normal speech level was what he would need

to be heard from across the street. I guess it was supposed to make him imposing.

I took the offensive.

"Since Elizabeth Garver's name is what got me in here, let's not pretend that you don't know why I came. Your name has been mentioned . . ."

"Now wait a minute," he bel-
lowed. "I've heard the stories, and I know what you're implying. For your information, my relationship with Mrs. Garver was strictly business."

"What's the business?"

"She owned a lot of property along Wheaton Road, and I put together the deals that kept her and her bum of a husband afloat. Now that she's, uh, gone, I guess it won't hurt to tell the truth about her money. Frank Weaver, her first husband, put up a good front, but that's all it was. When he died and she sold his plant, the pluses and minuses just about evened out. She was lucky, though, because she owned that Wheaton Road property and because I was a friend of the family and showed her how to make it pay off."

I could imagine how.

"When was the last time you saw her?"

"About a week ago. We were talking about another deal."

"What was it?"

"None of your business."

"It might turn out to be. Where were you night before last?"

"That's none of your business either," he shouted. "You can't come in here and question me like a common criminal."

"Okay," I said, pulling a notebook and pen. "It's J-U-S-T-I-N, right? I do want to get it spelled right on the subpoena for your deposition. What time would be convenient? How about Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday next week?"

He glared at me, but his voice lowered a couple of decibels.

"I was at home, watching a football game. And no, nobody was with me."

He fidgeted for a good thirty seconds while I stared at him. He was trying to decide if he should tell me something. Finally he did.

"Look, I wasn't with anyone, but I did talk to someone on the phone right after the game was over. That would be nearly midnight. That's when she was killed, right?"

"Who'd you talk to?"

"Guy Schooley."

"Guy Schooley, the bookie?"

"Hey, I bet on football. Okay? It's nothing I can't handle, and it's just for fun. Couple hundred just to keep the game interesting."

His noise level was back up.

"You call Schooley, or he call you?"

"He called me. My credit line was chewed up, and he said I'd have to come up with some cash if I wanted to bet the Monday night game."

"He calls you about midnight to check on a couple of hundred?"

"I had a bad Sunday. It went into the thousands. It's no problem. It's early in the season, I'll probably be even or ahead by November. Even if I'm not, I can afford it."

Maybe he could, but he still sounded to me like a man with a problem. I warned him that I'd check on his story. He puffed up some, but he didn't say anything to my back as I left his office.

As I drove home I thought about how Justin would have made Mrs. Garver's land "pay off."

Once upon a time, in a bar, a lawyer gave me a boozy lesson about real estate. "Know how to make gold out of dirt?" he said. "Zoning. Say you own a lot on a busy street. It's zoned residential and worth maybe five thousand dollars. Get it zoned commercial and it's worth ten or twenty times that. People who can get zoning are today's alchemists. Everybody else just owns dirt."

And how do people "get zon-

ing"? The lawyer snickered and went on to something else.

I figured Justin for an alchemist. An envelope stuffed with hundred dollar bills and left on the right government-owned desk would be his most effective formula. I wondered how much Mrs. Garver had understood. I decided she had probably known a lot. Quiet meetings, furtive glances, and a reluctance to admit what she was up to could have started the rumors about an affair.

At home I tossed a frozen dinner into the microwave, popped a beer, and called Frankton. I got no answer at his office, so I called him at home. I told him who I'd talked to and said I hadn't found any real holes in the case.

"Lisa George says she's got an alibi for when her mother was killed," I told him. "Says she was entertaining, but she won't say who. Might be worth pushing."

I told him what Justin had said about his relationship with Mrs. Garver and the land deal.

"Well, yeah, I knew about that. I did the legal work on her real estate deals. Did you find out anything about their being any cosier than that? Something I could use to show Garver might have had a reason to be mad?"

"He plays it like there was nothing, and it doesn't seem likely to me. His vice seems to be gambling. Heard anything about it?"

"Again, just rumors. I heard he was invited out of one of our better men's clubs after he refused to pay off after one of those Monte Carlo nights."

"Well, his alibi is a bookie named Guy Schooley. I'm going to pay him a visit at his place after dinner. How'd you do in court today?"

"We got a trial in November. Our boy doesn't understand why he can't get out on bail, and I'm supposed to remind you that you're being paid plenty to get him off."

"I know. Look, I want to check some stuff at the courthouse tomorrow. I'll bring you some kind of report tomorrow afternoon. You going to be in your office?"

"Far as I know. Hey, while you're at the courthouse, see if the prosecutor has our discovery."

Discovery is lawyer shorthand for the evidence, witness lists, and whatever else the prosecution has dug up and expects to present in court. The prosecution and defense are supposed to tell each other what they have. Despite what you see on TV, there aren't any surprise witnesses or exhibits

in the trial. At least there aren't supposed to be.

I knew Guy Schooley by sight and reputation from hanging around the courts. He was no Mr. Big in the racketeering business. He kept his books and ran a card game in the back room of a poolhall on my side of town. He kept a full-time legbreaker on the payroll, but that was the only kind of violence I'd heard of his getting involved in. Every now and then the cops raided his operation and he paid some fines, but he wasn't worth the trouble it would take to put him in jail. Besides, whoever took his place might be worse.

The School Room was as much bar as poolroom. I counted five people at the bar and only one at a pool table. The player was intent, but the other five and the bartender all gave me half-interested glances. I ordered a beer, and everyone turned back to his own business.

Schooley was one of the bar-sitters. He was at the end, next to a wall phone and a door. He was reading a sports newspaper. I introduced myself.

"Mr. Schooley? My name is Jess McBain. Can I talk to you for a minute?"

You don't go flashing private investigator credentials in a

place like the School Room. People there can be jumpy.

Schooley folded his paper and looked me up and down. He was a big man—over six foot two and a greasy two hundred thirty pounds. His hair was oily and his suit was dirty and his broken-toothed smile didn't extend to his eyes.

"What can I do for you, Mr. . . ."

"McBain. I'm doing some work for Mr. Richard Frankton. He's a lawyer, and right now he's representing a Mr. Vincent Garver. You may have read about his troubles."

Schooley nodded.

"Anyway, earlier today I talked to a Mr. Robert Justin about the events of Sunday night. He told me that he had spoken to you on the phone about midnight. Is that about right?"

Schooley stared at me; his smile had faded by half. I could see the wheels turning as he tried to figure out an angle that would show him a profit. He gave up and shrugged.

"Sure. I talked to him."

"Right after the Bears-Rams game Sunday?"

"Why, yes. I do believe there was a football game that night."

"Did he call you?"

"No, I believe I called him. He's one of our better players,"

Schooley said, waving to the pool tables. "I wanted to make sure he got his reservation in for Monday night."

"That's pretty much what Mr. Justin told me," I said. "Thank you for confirming his account."

I drained my beer and started for the door. Just before I got there, I heard Schooley laugh.

"Say, Mr. McBain. I really wish you luck on this job. Your client, Mr. Vincent Garver? He's probably our best player. We miss him already."

Another potential character witness for my employer.

Let's see, I thought, as I pulled into my alleyside garage, old Vince is a drunk, a wife-beater, and an unlucky gambler. He would not be popular with a jury. That put the pressure on Dick to strike a deal with the prosecutor, and it put another ace in the prosecutor's hand.

I saw the shadow move before I saw the mugger. He had been hiding behind a tree between the garage and my back door. If the moon hadn't been at his back as he stepped away from the tree, he might have hit me square with whatever it was he swung at the side of my head. I had just enough warning to get my head down and my left elbow up.

It was a sock filled with metal, probably coins; and it glanced off my elbow, putting my whole arm to sleep. The near-miss had thrown him off balance, though, and I spun to my left and threw a right hand in the direction I figured his body would be. I caught him in the belly, but my fist bounced off some hard muscle. I tried bringing my knee up into his groin, but he was pushing on my shoulders with both hands, and I went sprawling backwards. I rolled to the side and ducked under my otherwise useless left arm, using it as a shield against the next swing of the blackjack.

It didn't come. My visitor was running down the moonlit alley to the street. I was still well behind him when he turned into the street. I heard a car door slam, an engine start, and tires squeal. He was around a corner before I got there.

The feeling was coming back to my left arm as I walked back down the alley toward my house, thinking about my mugger. He was big and strong and obviously not a mugger. He had been in my back yard because he wanted me in particular. Muggers aren't so particular, and my back yard is not a high traffic corridor for potential victims.

At least, I hadn't thought

there was a lot of traffic until that night. When I strolled into the yard, I realized that there was someone else—a woman—moving around the side of the house. She must have seen me because she froze.

“Mr. McBain?”

It was Lisa George.

She had been on my front porch about to knock, she told me, when she heard a commotion in the back yard. She knocked several times, and when nobody answered she sneaked around the side of the house to check.

A few minutes later we were at opposite ends of a couch in the house library, which I had turned into my office. I was swilling my third beer of the evening, and she was sipping a cup of instant coffee. I didn't have the white zinfandel that had been her first choice.

“This is not a good neighborhood for unescorted young women at night,” I told her.

“I had to see you right away,” she told me. Her voice had the same level monotone, but there was a throatiness to it that had been missing at the health club. “I wanted to apologize for the way I acted at the club, and I want to talk to you about my mother's murder.”

She was wearing hip-squeezing jeans and had pulled her legs up under her. When she

leaned toward me I noticed that a button or two on her blouse had been unfastened since she came inside and took off the dark leather jacket she had been wearing. I kept quiet.

“I know you're working for my stepfather,” she said, the purr gone for the moment, “but I want you to know what a pig he is. After my divorce I moved back into my mother's house. Actually it was my house, too; Daddy had wanted it that way, and Mom agreed even though it was in her name.

“Anyway, I found that with Garver living there, I couldn't stay. He was always brushing against me or walking in on me when I wasn't dressed. When my mother was out of the house, he would try to get me alone for what he called ‘a stepfather-stepdaughter talk.’”

“We really don't need any more character witnesses for Mr. Garver,” I said.

It was a bad joke. She didn't smile.

“Look,” she said, “I want that pig to get everything he's got coming to him. I'm not asking you to do anything illegal, just take it easy and don't do anything to help Frankton get him a lighter sentence. I hate him, and I'm willing to do anything to get him put away forever. Anything.”

The second "anything" had come with a lot of breath. She leaned toward me and put her hand on my knee. I hoped she couldn't tell that my breathing had speeded up.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. George," I said, meaning it. "What you're asking probably is illegal, and anyway, it would be a violation of the rules of my game. And if it weren't for those rules, there'd still be state rules. I could lose my license."

"I'm going to have plenty of money," she said. Her voice and expression were as cold as they had been that afternoon.

I shook my head.

She slammed her coffee cup on the end table and got to her feet.

"You and Frankton are just alike," she hissed, her teeth clenched. "If he gets off, I'll spend every penny I have to get even with the two of you."

Romance moved in and out of my life so quickly. She even rejected my offer to walk her to her car.

They buried Elizabeth Garver the next morning after a private funeral that her husband did not attend.

I went to the courthouse. The names Elizabeth Weaver and Elizabeth Garver showed up several times in the property

transfer books. Like Justin said, she had been selling Wheaton Road property regularly since her first husband died.

In the assessor's office I found out that when she died she owned only one parcel—the house and five acres around it. They were assessed at a quarter million dollars, so the market value was probably triple that. Pretty expensive real estate for turning into the little shopping plaza that would fit there. But if she had been planning another deal as Justin said, that had to be it.

I was just getting ready to close the map book when I noticed something about the neighborhood. Elizabeth Garver's home was at the north end of Wheaton Road. To the east and west of Wheaton Road were homes and estates worth at least as much as hers. The north boundary of her property was the city limits, and north of that it was all farmland and scrubland. Her property was like a cork in a bottleneck. Pull the cork, run Wheaton Road north through the bottleneck, and the thousand-dollar-an-acre land would be worth ten or twenty times that much.

The name Justin Enterprises was all over the upper part of the map.

I went from the assessor's office to the prosecutor's office for a visit with Kate Irwin. Normally, she would let one of her assistants prosecute a husband-and-wife homicide, but the prominence of the people involved in this one made it a top drawer case.

"You won't like it, Jess," she said, tossing a thick folder across her desk. "You probably didn't know about the diary."

The folder contained photocopies of police reports, witness statements, and murder scene photographs. There were also copies of pages from Mrs. Garver's diary. "What do they say?" I asked, knowing I wouldn't like the answer.

"She was going to divorce him and kick him out with nothing but the clothes that still fit. Think that gives him a motive? There's also stuff about how he beat her up twice in the last three months and other times before that. Jurors just love testimony from the murder victim."

"If she divorced him, would he get half the money if she sold the house?"

"Nope. The house belonged to her and her daughter before the marriage. While they were married, she could give him any allowance she wanted, but he couldn't have pried a dime out of her in divorce court. Be-

sides, she had decided not to sell."

"Huh?"

"It's right there in the diary," she said. "Robert Justin, the developer, had offered her eight hundred thousand for the property, but Mrs. Carver figured that without a spendthrift husband to support, she could get by on what she had. She was going to stay in that house for the rest of her life. She turned down Justin's offer."

"That's right," Justin bellowed after I'd brushed past his receptionist and his secretary and barged into his office. "It was going to be my deal and my property. But she was still going to make money. There was nothing illegal about that."

"There's something illegal about coldblooded murder for profit."

"You're crazy. Why should I kill her? She was going to help me make money."

"You'd kill her because she turned you down. You had to get rid of her so you could deal with whoever ends up with the property."

"You really are crazy. The deal was done. The papers were all drawn up and signed, and the lawyers tell me the deal can go through even though she's

dead. I just pay her share of the money into her estate."

"What do you mean her share?"

"Her seventy-five percent. Just like always, she gets seventy-five, Lisa George gets twenty-five. That's the way Frank Weaver wanted it, and that's the way it works. Now, I've had it with you and your accusations. Get your butt out of here before I have you arrested for trespassing."

He wasn't behaving like a cornered criminal. And he sounded like someone telling the truth. He might have been bluffing, but then my whole attack strategy had been a bluff. I mustered a sneer, turned my back on him, and walked slowly out of his office and his building. I tried to act like I knew what was going on. Another bluff.

I drove to Wheaton Avenue and cruised up and down for thirty minutes thinking about real estate deals and paperwork and lawyers. I stopped at a phone booth and called Dick Frankton. I told him I had some evidence that would help Garver. We agreed to meet at his office at two o'clock in the afternoon.

Then I had lunch with Kate Irwin and Elizabeth Garver's diary.

* * *

I was expected and should go right in, Dick's secretary told me. He was signing papers.

"So, Jess, what's the good news?"

His cheerfulness was forced.

"You didn't tell me you were selling Elizabeth Garver's house."

"Didn't I? Yeah. Well, that's true. I'm just cleaning up the paperwork now." He was surprised and irritated. "I guess I was a little worried that you might think, it's some sort of conflict of interest. You know, representing the victim and her killer."

"Yeah," I said. "And the divorce, too."

He whitened.

"You can stop lying now, Dick. I know she told you to turn down Justin's offer. And I know you'd talked to her about the divorce."

He was on his feet.

"You can't come in here . . ."

This time I knew who was bluffing and who had the cards. I tossed the photocopies of Elizabeth Garver's diary on his desk. I told him what was in them.

"You're right about the conflict," I said. "But the real estate deal was nothing compared to the divorce. You had to keep quiet about that, or the courts never would have let you

handle Garver's defense. And you really wanted to handle his defense, didn't you? You wanted to make sure the frame stuck. Were you going to try to keep his prison time down? Or were you going to let the prosecutor hang him as high as she wanted? Is that why you encouraged me just to go through the motions?"

He was clinging tight to the edge of his desk.

"Are you accusing me of killing Elizabeth Garver?"

"Nope. Lisa George killed Elizabeth Garver. The only reason you got yourself into this was for Lisa. I assume she's back there listening," I said, pointing to the half-open door to the room where Dick kept his law books. "When I told you I had good news for Garver, I knew it would mean bad news for you and Lisa. I figured she'd want to be here to hear it."

Things turned frosty when the snow queen entered the room. She didn't say a word. Just tried to freeze me with those blue-ice eyes.

Frankton had slumped back into his chair. I had a quiet and attentive audience for the rest of my report. I addressed Dick.

"I said just now that Lisa killed her mother, but I'm only making that assumption because that's the way your de-

fense attorneys are going to want it. They're going to want her to have hit her mother during an argument over selling the house. Then she brings you in to help her cover up and frame her stepfather.

"One alternative to that story is that Lisa got you to kill Mrs. Garver for her, either taking you to the house or letting you use her key. She would have gotten one hundred percent of the sale instead of the twenty-five percent she always got. The attorneys aren't going to suggest that scenario; it could get you both electrocuted.

"The other possibility is that Lisa planned the murder, did it herself, and brought you in afterward. That's the one I lean toward, but then I know Lisa is a coldblooded killer."

I turned to Lisa.

"Your story about why you came to my house last night wasn't too bad for a caught-in-the-act lie. How was I going to get it? A knife in the kidney? A bullet in the head?

"You might not have known about that little wrinkle, Dick, but I'm sure it was you who told her that I'd found out a few things. You knew the land deal could lead to questions about why you were defending Garver. You're the nervous sort, and you probably made Lisa nervous. She didn't like

me anyway, you know. She found out from you that I would be getting home late, and she sent somebody—was it one of the good-hairs from the gym?—to rough me up, leave me unconscious or next thing to it. The idea was that after he's gone, Lisa shows up and finishes me. Probably takes my wallet to make it look authentic. Even if later her musclebound buddy figures out what really happened, he's in too deep to talk.

"Trouble was, she picked a champion who was only good at throwing around things that don't fight back. Probably'd never even been in a fistfight. Anyway, she comes around the house, and there I am, upright and wide awake. She gets the idea of telling me she's there to offer sex as a bribe. She even tried to make me think she'd offered you a similar deal and you'd refused. If I'd gone for it, she probably would have paid off on the spot. I get the feeling she's played the role at least a couple of times recently."

Dick glared at me, then lowered his eyes.

"It wasn't just sex with you, was it, Dick? You really love her. That's the only reason I could think of that you'd risk

so much to frame Garver. She's the only thing you had to gain. It's a poor payoff, Dick."

"You can't prove any of this," Lisa snarled. It startled Dick.

"Won't have to," I told her, strolling toward the door. "The prosecutor knows what Dick's got himself into. Dick'll talk."

The intercom buzzed.

"There's a Mr. Blanchard from the prosecutor's office to see you," the secretary said.

Dick put his head in his hands. Lisa turned away from him in disgust. She knew he'd be looking for a deal.

The real estate deal that Elizabeth Garver never made was voided, and Vincent Garver ended up with the house and property. He started getting cosy with Justin.

Garver also got the idea that he was out of jail because he was innocent—not because of anything I had done. Besides, he said, he was the one who first mentioned that Lisa might be the killer. In the end, he refused to pay me.

I told Kate Irwin to go back into Mrs. Garver's diary and look for entries about how you make money in real estate. I suggested she watch for zoning changes.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

A Terribly Strange Bed

by Wilkie
Collins

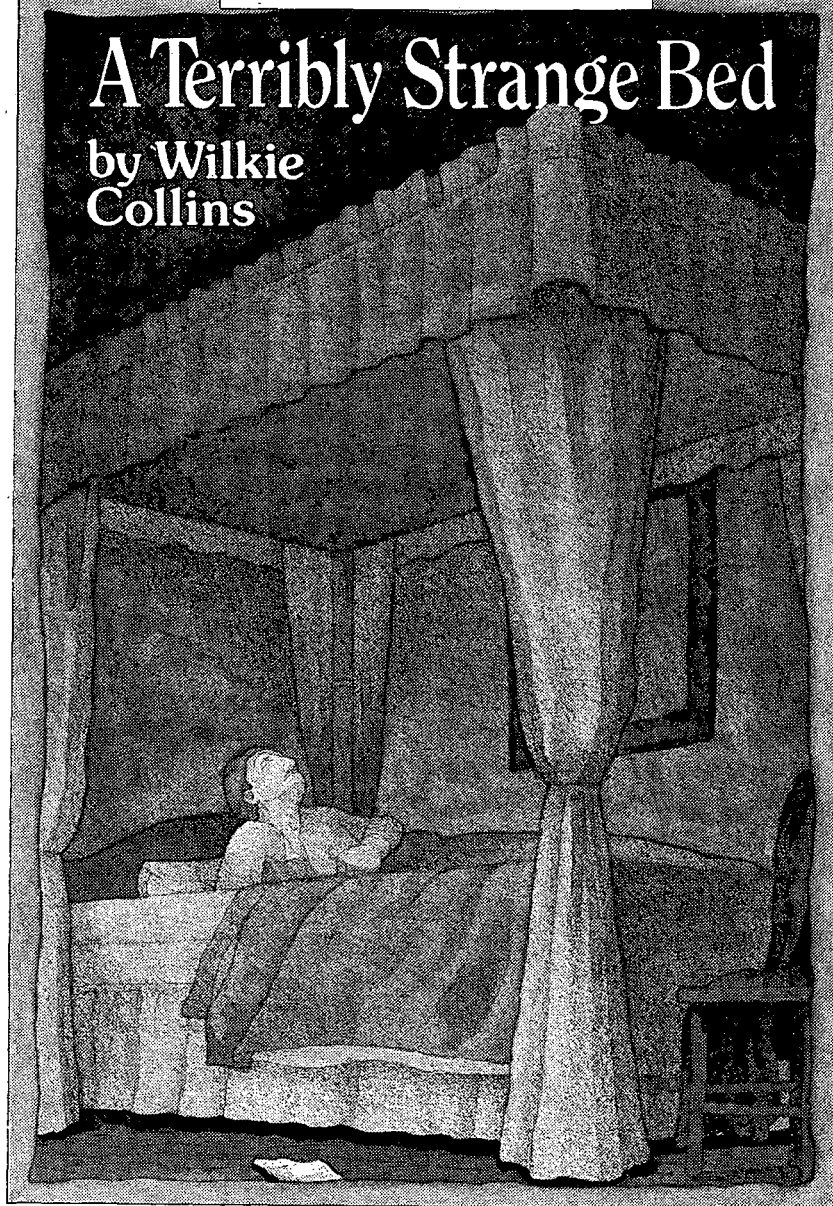


Illustration by Jim Adams

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Shortly after my education at college was finished, I happened to be staying at Paris with an English friend. We were both young, and lived rather a wild life.

One night I said to my friend, "Let us go somewhere where we can see a little genuine gambling, with no false glitter thrown over it. Let us get away from fashionable Frascati's to a house where they don't mind letting in a man with a ragged coat."

"Very well," said he, "we needn't go out of the Palais Royal to find the sort of company you want. Here's the place just before us; as blackguard a place as you could possibly want to see."

Entering the house, we went upstairs, left our hats and sticks with the doorkeeper, and were admitted into the chief gambling room. We had come to see blackguards, but the people assembled there were something worse, and the quiet of the room was horrible. The thin, haggard, longhaired young man, whose sunken eyes fiercely watched the turning up of the cards, never spoke; the flabby, fat-faced pimply player, who pricked his piece of pasteboard perseveringly to register how often black won, and how often red—never spoke; the dirty, wrinkled old man, with the vulture eyes and the darned greatcoat, who had lost his last sou, and still looked on desperately, after he could play no longer—never spoke. Even the voice of the croupier sounded as if it were dulled and thickened by the atmosphere of the room. I had entered the place to laugh, but I soon found it necessary to take refuge in excitement from the depression of spirits which began to steal on me.

I sought the nearest excitement by going to the table, and beginning to play. Unfortunately, as the event will show, I won—won prodigiously; won incredibly; won at such a rate that the regular players at the table crowded round me; and staring at my stakes with hungry, superstitious eyes, whispered to one another that the English stranger was going to break the bank.

The game was Rouge et Noir. I had played it in every city in Europe, but a gambler, in the strict sense of the word, I had never been. My gaming was a mere idle amusement. I never practiced it so incessantly as to lose more than I could afford, or to gain more than I could pocket without being thrown off my balance by my good luck.

On this occasion it was very different—now, for the first time in my life, I felt what the passion of play really was. My success first bewildered, and then intoxicated me. Incredible as it may appear, I only lost when I attempted to estimate chances, and played ac-

according to previous calculation. If I left everything to luck, and staked without any care or consideration, I was sure to win—to win in the face of every recognized probability in favor of the bank.

Time after time, I staked higher, and still won. The excitement in the room rose to fever pitch. The silence was interrupted by muttered oaths every time the gold was shoveled across to my side of the table—until the imperturbable croupier dashed his rake on the floor in a fury of astonishment at my success. Only one man present preserved his self-possession; and that man was my friend. He came to my side, and whispering in English, begged me to leave the place satisfied with what I had already gained. He repeated his warnings and entreaties several times; and only left me and went away after I had rejected his advice (for I was to all intents and purposes gambling drunk) in terms which rendered it impossible for him to address me again that night.

Shortly after he had gone, a hoarse voice behind me cried: "Permit me, my dear sir! permit me to restore to their proper place two Napoleons which you have dropped. Wonderful luck, sir! I pledge you my word of honor as an old soldier, in the course of my long experience in this sort of thing, I never saw such luck as yours—never! Go on, sir. *Sacré mille bombes!* Go on boldly, and break the bank!"

Turning round I saw, nodding and smiling at me with inveterate civility, a tall man, dressed in a frogged and braided surtout. If I had been in my senses, I should have considered him as being rather a suspicious specimen of an old soldier. He had goggling bloodshot eyes, mangy mustachios, a broken nose, and the dirtiest pair of hands I ever saw—even in France. However, in the reckless triumph of that moment, I was ready to fraternize with anybody who encouraged me in my game. I accepted the old soldier's offered pinch of snuff, clapped him on the back, and swore he was the most glorious relic of the Grand Army that I had met.

"Go on," cried my military friend, snapping his fingers in ecstasy—"Go on, and win! Break the bank. *Mille tonnerres!* My gallant English comrade, break the bank!"

And I did go on—went on at such a rate that in another quarter of an hour the croupier called out: "Gentlemen! The bank has discontinued for tonight." All the notes and all the gold in that "bank" now lay in a heap under my hands.

"Tie up the money in your pocket handkerchief, my worthy sir," said the old soldier as I plunged my hands into my heap of gold.

"Tie it up, as we used to tie up a bit of dinner in the Grand Army: your winnings are too heavy for any breeches pocket that ever was sewed. There, that's it!—shovel them in, notes and all! *Crédie!* what luck! Now then, sir—two tight double knots each way with your honorable permission, and the money's safe. Feel it! feel it, fortunate sir! hard and round as a cannon ball. Ah! bah! if they had only fired such cannon balls at us at Austerlitz. *Nom d'une pipe* . . . if they only had! And now as an ancient grenadier, what remains for me to do? Simply this: to entreat my valued English friend to drink a bottle of champagne with me, before we part."

"Excellent! Champagne by all means!"

"Bravo! the Englishman; another glass. Ah! bah!—the bottle is empty! Never mind! *Vive le vin!* I, the old soldier, order another bottle, and half a pound of bon-bons with it."

"No, no, ex-brave, *your* bottle last time; my bottle this. Toast away! The French army!—the great Napoleon!—the present company!"

By the time the second bottle of champagne was emptied, I felt as if I had been drinking liquid fire—my brain seemed all aflame. "Ex-brave of the French army!" cried I, in a mad state of exhilaration, "I am on fire! Let us have a third bottle of champagne to put the flame out!"

The old soldier placed his dirty forefinger by the side of his broken nose and solemnly ejaculated, "Coffee!"

"Listen, my dear sir, to an old soldier's advice. Coffee will help to rid you of your exaltation of spirits before going home. With all that money it is a sacred duty to yourself to have your wits about you. You are known to be a winner to an enormous extent by several gentlemen present tonight, who are in many ways worthy and excellent fellows; but they are mortal men, my dear sir, and they have their amiable weaknesses!"

As the ex-brave ended, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups. My attentive friend handed me one of the cups with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it at a draught. Almost instantly afterwards, I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance; and stammered out that I felt unwell—so unwell that I did not know how I was to get home.

"My dear friend," answered the old soldier, "it would be madness to go home in your present state; you would be sure to lose your money; you might be robbed and murdered with the greatest ease.

I am going to sleep here; do *you* sleep here, too—they make up capital beds in this house—take one; sleep off the effects of the wine, and go home safely with your winnings tomorrow—tomorrow in broad daylight.”

I had but two ideas left—one, that I must never let go of my handkerchief full of money; the other, that I must lie down somewhere immediately, and fall into a comfortable sleep. So I agreed to the proposal about the bed, and preceded by the croupier, we passed along some passages and up a flight of stairs into the bedroom which I was to occupy. The ex-brave shook me warmly by the hand, proposed that we should breakfast together, and then, followed by the croupier, left me for the night.

I ran to the washstand; drank some of the water in my jug; poured the rest out, plunged my face into it, then sat down in a chair and tried to compose myself. I soon felt better. The change for my lungs, from the fetid atmosphere of the gambling room to the cool air of the apartment I now occupied; the almost equally refreshing change for my eyes, from the glaring gaslights of the “salon” to the dim, quiet flicker of one bedroom candle, aided wonderfully the restorative effects of cold water. The giddiness left me, and I began to feel more like a reasonable being. My first thought was the risk of sleeping all night in a gambling house; my second, of the still greater risk of trying to get out after the house was closed, and of going home alone at night, through the streets of Paris, with a large sum of money about me. I had slept in worse places than this on my travels, so I determined to lock my door, and take my chance till the next morning.

Accordingly I looked under the bed and into the cupboard; tried the fastening of the window; and then, satisfied that I had taken every precaution, pulled off my upper clothing, put my light, which was a dim one, on the hearth among a feathery litter of wood ashes, and got into bed with the handkerchief full of money under my pillow.

I soon felt not only that I could not go to sleep, but that I could not even close my eyes. I was wide awake and every one of my senses seemed to be preternaturally sharpened. I raised myself on my elbow, and looked about the room—which was brightened by a lovely moonlight pouring through the window—to see if it contained any pictures or ornaments that I could at all clearly distinguish. While my eyes wandered from wall to wall, a remembrance of Le Maistre’s delightful little book, *Voyage Autour de Ma Cham-*

bre, occurred to me. I resolved to imitate the French author, and find occupation and amusement enough to beguile the tedium of my wakefulness, by making a mental inventory of every article of furniture I could see, and by following to their sources the multitude of associations which even a chair, a table, or a washstand may be able to call forth.

In the nervous, unsettled state of my mind at that moment, I found it much easier to make my inventory than to make my reflections and thereupon soon gave up all hope of thinking in Le Maistre's fanciful track—or, indeed, of thinking at all. I looked about the room at the different articles of furniture, and did nothing more.

There was, first, the bed I was lying in: a four-post bed, with the regular top lined with chintz—the regular fringed valance all round—the regular stifling unwholesome curtains, which I remembered having mechanically drawn back against the posts when I first got into the room. There was the marble-topped washstand, from which the water I had spilt, in my hurry to pour it out, was still dripping, slowly and more slowly, onto the brick floor. Then two small chairs, with my coat, waistcoat, and trousers flung on them. Then a large elbow chair, covered with dirty-white dimity, with my cravat and shirt collar thrown over the back. Then a chest of drawers with two of the brass handles off, and a tawdry, broken china inkstand placed on it by way of ornament. Then the dressing table, with a small looking-glass, and a large pincushion. Then the window—an unusually large window. Then a dark old picture, which the feeble candle dimly showed me. It was the picture of a fellow in a high Spanish hat, crowned with a plume of towering feathers. A swarthy, sinister ruffian, looking upward—it might be at some tall gallows on which he was going to be hanged. At any rate, he had the appearance of thoroughly deserving it.

This picture put a kind of constraint upon me to look upward, too—at the top of the bed. It was a gloomy and not an interesting object, and I looked back at the picture. I counted the feathers in the man's hat—they stood out in relief—three white, two green. I observed the crown of his hat, which was of a conical shape, according to the fashion supposed to have been favored by Guy Fawkes. I wondered what he could be looking up at. It must be the high gallows, and he was going to be hanged presently. Would the executioner come into possession of his conical crowned hat and plume of feathers? I counted the feathers again—three white and

two green.

While I still lingered over this very improving and intellectual employment, my thoughts insensibly began to wander. I became absorbed in past scenes; but suddenly, in an instant, the thread on which my memories hung, snapped. My attention came back to present things more vividly than ever, and I found myself looking hard at the picture.

Looking at what?

Good god, the man had pulled his hat down on his brows! No!—the hat itself was gone! Where was the conical crown? Where the feathers—three white, two green? Not there! In the place of the hat and feathers, what dusky object was it that now hid his forehead, his eyes, his shading hand?

Was the bed moving?

I turned on my back and looked up. Was I mad? drunk? dreaming? giddy again? or was the top of the bed really moving down—sinking slowly, regularly, silently, horribly, right down throughout the whole of its length and breadth—right down upon me, as I lay underneath?

A deadly, paralyzing coldness stole over me. I turned my head on the pillow, determined to test whether the bed top was really moving or not, by keeping my eye on the man in the picture.

The next look in that direction was enough. The dull, black, frowsy outline of the valance above me was within an inch of being parallel with his waist. I still looked breathlessly. Steadily and slowly—very slowly—I saw the figure, and the line of frame below the figure, vanish as the valance moved down before it.

I am, constitutionally, anything but timid. I have been on more than one occasion in peril of my life, and have not lost my self-possession for an instant; but when the conviction first settled on my mind that the bed top was actually moving, was steadily and continuously sinking down upon me, I looked up shuddering, helpless, panic-stricken, beneath the hideous machinery for murder which was advancing closer and closer, to suffocate me where I lay.

Motionless, speechless, breathless, I lay. The candle, fully spent, went out; but the moonlight still brightened the room. Down and down, without pausing and without a sound, came the bed top, and still my panic terror seemed to bind me faster and faster to the mattress on which I lay—down and down it sank, till the dusty odor from the lining of the canopy came stealing into my nostrils.

At that final moment the instinct of self-preservation startled me out of my trance, and I moved. There was just room for me to roll myself sideways off the bed. As I dropped noiselessly to the floor, the edge of the murderous canopy touched me on the shoulder.

Without stopping to draw my breath, without wiping the cold sweat from my face, I rose instantly on my knees to watch the bed top. I was literally spellbound by it.

It descended—the whole canopy with the fringe round it, came down—down—close down; so close that there was not room now to squeeze my finger between the bed top and the bed. I felt at the sides and discovered that what had appeared to me from beneath to be the ordinary light canopy of a four-post bed, was in reality a thick broad mattress, the substance of which was concealed by the valance and its fringe. I looked up and saw the four posts rising hideously bare. In the middle of the bed top was a huge wooden screw that had evidently worked it down through a hole in the ceiling, in the way ordinary presses are worked down on to the substance selected for compression. The apparatus moved without making the faintest noise. There had been no creaking as it came down. Still, as I looked on it, I could not move, I could hardly breathe, but I began to recover the power of thinking, and in a moment had discovered in all its horror the murderous conspiracy framed against me.

My cup of coffee had been drugged, but—drugged too strongly. I had been saved from being smothered by having taken an overdose of some narcotic. How I had chafed and fretted at the fever fit which had preserved my life by keeping me awake! How recklessly I had confided myself to the two wretches who had led me into this room, determined, for the sake of my winnings, to kill me in my sleep by the surest and most horrible contrivance for secretly accomplishing my destruction! How many men, winners like me, had slept, as I had proposed to sleep, in that bed, and had never been seen or heard of more?

Ere long, all thought was suspended by the sight of the murderous canopy moving once more. After it had remained on the bed—as nearly as I could guess—about ten minutes, it began to move up again. The villains who worked it from above evidently believed that their purpose was accomplished. Slowly and silently, as it had descended, that horrible bed top rose towards its former place. When it reached the upper extremities of the four posts, it

reached the ceiling too. Neither hole nor screw could be seen; the bed became in appearance an ordinary bed again—the canopy an ordinary canopy.

Now, for the first time I was able to move, to rise from my knees, to dress myself, and to consider how I should escape. If I betrayed by the smallest noise that the attempt to suffocate me had failed, I was certain to be murdered. Had I made any noise already? I listened intently, looking towards the door.

No! No footsteps in the passage outside—no sound of a tread light or heavy. In the room above—absolute silence. Besides locking and bolting my door, I had moved an old wooden chest against it. To remove this chest—my blood ran cold as imagination suggested what might be its contents—without making some disturbance was impossible; and moreover, to think of escaping through the house, now barred up for the night, would be sheer insanity. One chance was left me—the window. I stole to it on tiptoe.

My bedroom was on the first floor, above an entresol, and looked into the back street. I raised my hand to open the window, knowing that on that action hung, by the merest hair's breadth, my chance of safety—for they keep vigilant watch in a House of Murder. If any part of the frame cracked, if the hinge creaked, I was a lost man! It must have occupied me at least five minutes, reckoning by time—five hours, reckoning by suspense—to open that window. I succeeded in doing it silently—in doing it with the dexterity of a housebreaker—and then looked down into the street. To leap the distance beneath me would be almost certain destruction. Next, I looked at the sides of the house. Down the left ran a thick water pipe—it passed close to the outer edge of the window.

To some the means of escape which I had discovered might have seemed difficult—to me the prospect of slipping down the pipe into the street did not suggest even a thought of peril.

I had already got one leg over the sill, when I remembered the handkerchief, filled with money, under my pillow. I could well have afforded to leave it behind me, but I was determined that the miscreants of the gambling house should miss their plunder as well as their victim. I went back to the bed therefore and tied the heavy handkerchief at my back by my cravat.

Just as I had made it tight and fixed in a comfortable place, I thought I heard a sound of breathing outside the door. The chill feeling of horror ran through me again as I listened. No! Dead silence still in the passage—I had only heard the night air blowing

softly into the room. The next moment I was on the window sill—and the next I had a firm grip on the water pipe.

I slid down into the street easily and quietly, as I thought I should, and immediately set off at the top of my speed to a branch Prefecture of Police, which I knew was in the immediate neighborhood. A sub-prefect and several of his subordinates were up. But, when I began my story, in a breathless hurry and very bad French, I could see that the sub-prefect suspected me of being a drunken Englishman who had been robbed. He soon altered his opinion, and before I had concluded, he shoved the papers before him into a drawer, put on his hat, supplied me with another (for I was bareheaded), and ordered a file of soldiers, desired his expert followers to get ready all sorts of tools for breaking open doors, and ripping up brick flooring, and took my arm, in the most friendly and familiar manner possible, to lead me with him out of the house.

Sentinels were placed at the back and front of the house the moment we got to it; a tremendous battery of knocks was directed against the door; a light appeared at a window; I was told to conceal myself behind the police—then came more knocks, and a cry of "Open in the name of the law!" At that terrible summons bolts and locks gave way before an invisible hand, and the moment after, the sub-prefect was in the passage, confronting a waiter half dressed and ghastly pale.

"We want to see the Englishman who is sleeping in this house."

"He went away hours ago."

"He did no such thing. His friend went away; he remained. Show us to his bedroom."

"I swear to you, monsieur le sous-préfet, he is not here! He—"

"I swear to you, monsieur le garçon, he is. He slept here—he didn't find your bed comfortable—he came to us to complain of it—he is here among my men—and here am I ready to look for a flea or two in his bedstead. Renaudin," calling to one of his subordinates, and pointing to the waiter, "collar that man, and tie his hands behind him. Now, then, gentlemen, let us walk upstairs!" Every man and woman in the house was secured—the "Old Soldier" first. I identified the bed in which I had slept and we then went on to the room above.

No object that was at all extraordinary appeared in any part of it. The sub-prefect looked round the place, commanded everybody be silent, stamped twice on the floor, called for a candle, looked attentively at the spot he had stamped on, and ordered the flooring

there to be carefully taken up. This was done in no time. Lights were produced, and we saw a deep, rafted cavity between the floor of this room and the ceiling of the room beneath. Through this cavity there ran perpendicularly a sort of case of iron thickly greased; and inside the case appeared the screw, which communicated with the bed top below. Extra lengths of screw, freshly oiled; levers covered with felt; the complete upper works of a heavy press—constructed with infernal ingenuity to join the fixtures below, and when taken to pieces again to go into the smallest possible compass—were next discovered and pulled out on the floor. After some little difficulty the sub-prefect succeeded in putting the machinery together, and leaving his men to work it, descended with me to the bedroom. The smothering canopy was then lowered, but not so noiselessly as I had seen it lowered. When I mentioned this to the sub-prefect, his answer, simple as it was, was significant. "My men," said he, "are working down the bed top for the first time—the men whose money you won were in better practice."

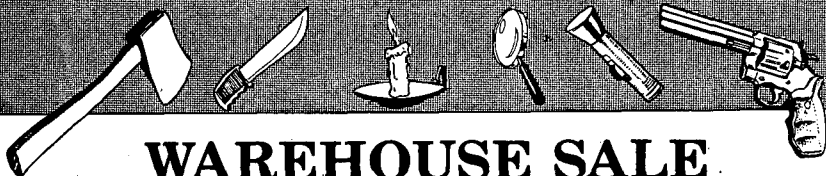
We left the house in the possession of two police agents—the inmates having been removed to prison. The sub-prefect, after taking down my *procès-verbal* in his office, returned with me to my hotel to get my passport. "Do you think," I asked, as I gave it to him, "that any men have really been smothered in that bed, as they tried to smother me?"

"I have seen dozens of drowned men laid out at the morgue," answered the sub-prefect, "in whose pocketbooks were found letters, stating that they had committed suicide in the Seine because they had lost everything at the gaming table. Do I know how many of those men entered the same gaming house that you entered? won as you won? took that bed as you took it? slept in it? were smothered in it? and were thrown into the river, with a letter of explanation written by the murderers and placed in their pocketbooks? No man can say how many or how few have escaped the fate from which you have escaped."

The rest of my story is soon told. I was examined; the gambling house was searched from top to bottom; the prisoners were separately interrogated; and two of the less guilty made a confession. I discovered that the Old Soldier was the master of the gambling house; justice discovered that he had been drummed out of the army as a vagabond years ago; that he had been guilty of all sorts of villainies since; that he was in possession of stolen property, which the owner identified; and that he, the croupier, another ac-

complice, and the woman who had made my coffee were all in the secret of the bedstead. There appeared to be some doubt as to whether the servants attached to the house knew anything of the suffocating machinery; and they received the benefit of that doubt, by being treated simply as thieves and vagabonds. As for the Old Soldier and his two head myrmidons, they went to the galleys; the woman who had drugged my coffee was imprisoned for I forget how many years; the regular visitors to the gambling house were considered "suspicious," and placed under "surveillance"; and I became for a week the "lion" of Parisian society.

My adventure cured me of ever again trying Rouge et Noir as an amusement. The sight of a green cloth, with packs of cards and heaps of money on it, will henceforth be for ever associated in my mind with the sight of a bed canopy descending to suffocate me in the silence and darkness of the night.



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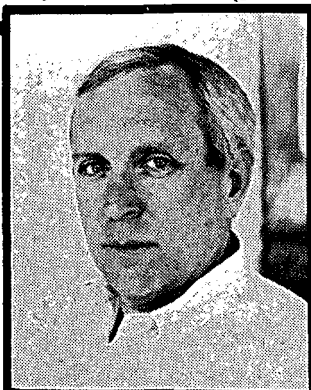
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BOOKED & PRINTED

by Carol Harper



STEPHEN DOBYNS

Photo by Margot Balboni

“Charlie Bradshaw [was] not a noticeable man. At least four inches under six feet, he was becoming stout: cherubic, his wife said, a woman who did not like cherubs. His light brown hair had begun to recede. Not wishing to be accused of hiding it, he brushed it straight back. . . . His face in profile was a series of forward curves; from the front it was round and thoughtful with large blue eyes. It was a smooth face that easily turned pink from cold weather, physical exertion or simple embarrassment. It was neither youthful nor handsome. ‘Presentable’ was the word Charlie used.”

These words describe the

hero of Stephen Dobyns’ *Saratoga* series on Charlie Bradshaw’s forty-first birthday. In *Saratoga Longshot* (first published by Atheneum in 1976 and subsequently published “in slightly revised” form by Penguin in 1987), Charlie Bradshaw, an officer in the Community and Youth Relations Bureau of the Saratoga Springs police department, has taken on a search for a missing young man, the son of an old high school flame who has not contacted his mother since he left for New York City. It is on his trip to New York, which Charlie has given himself as a birthday present, that we get to know about Charlie’s life and loves.

The above description

changes only slightly through the series. Charlie has quit the department, divorced his wife (who seems more upset that Charlie thought of it first), and become head of security for a stable in Saratoga by the start of the second book, *Saratoga Swimmer* (Atheneum, 1981; Penguin, 1983). He has also taken up swimming at the YMCA to control that depressing tendency towards stoutness. In the third book, *Saratoga Headhunter* (Viking Penguin, 1985), Charlie is a not-very-successful private detective who has bought a lake cottage for the solitude and traded in his trademark yellow VW beetle on a Renault. In *Saratoga Snapper* (Viking Penguin, 1986), he is manager by night for the Bentley Hotel (owned by his mother) and P.I. by day. In *Saratoga Bestiary* (Viking, 1988), he has turned fifty and has a full load of cases, few of which actually involve paying clients. By *Saratoga Hexameter* (Viking, 1990), however, even the police and rival P.I.'s are hiring Charlie for undercover work.

As might be expected, much of the background of this series is involved with the town of Saratoga Springs, which makes its money from resorts, spas, artists' retreats, and horse racing. Superimposed on this setting is Charlie's fascination

with the history of Saratoga—the golden age of gambling and gangsters, some of which persists in the shadows of Charlie Bradshaw's life. But Charlie doesn't stop with Saratoga history; he is fascinated with baddies of all kinds. Charlie is a voracious reader and knows the life and death stories of all of them from the first bank robbers to modern times. He may be the only private detective who decorates his office and home with photographs of Jesse James, the Hole in the Wall Bunch, and the Dalton Gang. The reader of this series becomes educated as well, since Charlie constantly ruminates about whether Jesse or Frank or Tom Horn or Wyatt Earp would have done things differently.

Charlie's relationships are another key ingredient in the series. He perhaps became a policeman because his earliest memories are of the kind officers who comforted his family upon the suicide of his father. But his father, an inveterate gambler and ne'er-do-well, is the key to his many friendships with the shady characters in Saratoga. These old gamblers, only some of whom are retired, act as information sources when Charlie is on a case and are Charlie's main contact with his father—his only source of connection with his past. His

family members, notably his mother and cousins, do not seem to provide this same connection. His mother Mabel, formerly a maid in the grand hotels, then a waitress who constantly bought "pieces" of racehorses, loved his father but really doesn't understand Charlie's need to "know" him. She is more concerned that Charlie not embarrass the three successful cousins, Jack, James, and Robert, who have always been held up as examples to him. Charlie loves his cousins but is frustrated by their conformity, their "goodness," and their obvious financial success.

Mabel finally struck it rich on one of those horses she owned a piece of. In *Saratoga Swimmer*, she is traveling around the country, racing the horse and winning. In *Saratoga Headhunter*, she is gambling with the proceeds at Atlantic City and winning. By the time of *Saratoga Snapper*, she has fulfilled her dream—she has bought a hotel and fixed it up in Victorian decor (all red velvet and flocked wallpaper) and is making such a success of it that she can spend the off-season in Florida or traveling around Europe, absorbing "culture."

Charlie's ex-wife Marge likes to think of herself as a strong, no-nonsense woman. She is part owner of a boutique in Sar-

atoga Springs and spends a great deal of time shopping for merchandise in New York City. It is possible that she had really wanted to marry one of Charlie's three cousins; when that became out of the question, she may only have married Charlie to gain entry into this paragon of a family. Being cut out of it seems to be the only reason she resents the divorce. Charlie avoids the part of town where Marge's shop is located; he cannot abide her constant recriminations and the constant attempts on the part of his cousins to get them back together.

Charlie's former employer, Chief Peterson, valued Charlie as long as he was employed as a policeman and as long as he could claim credit for Charlie's successful investigations. But Peterson resents the fact that Charlie quit the force; he even tries to defame Charlie by hinting that he fired him. It doesn't help that Peterson is a stupid man who will take the easiest way out of a case, and that Charlie, despite his feelings of inadequacy, always seems to home in on the causes and perpetrators of crimes while Peterson is posturing and failing. Even though Charlie always cooperates with the police at the beginning of a case, therefore, Peterson's nasty cracks and innuendoes usually force

Charlie into independent action, more success, and ultimately more resentment on the part of the Saratoga Springs police.

In *Saratoga Longshot*, Charlie meets Victor Plotz, caretaker of the apartment building where the missing boy lived. At that time, Victor "was in his early fifties and had a round red face with gray bushy eyebrows and gray bushy sideburns and gray bushy hair, giving his head a soft mushroom shape." Victor's hair, and that of his one-eyed cat Moshe, remind Charlie of the dustballs accumulated under his bed. While Charlie and Victor start out with an antagonistic relationship in *Longshot*, eventually, Victor becomes Charlie's best friend in New York. When Charlie takes over the security at the stables, he hires Victor, and Victor becomes Charlie's unofficial partner in the Charles F. Bradshaw Detective Agency. Victor also takes quite well to being head of security for Mabel's hotel and begins dressing in dove gray, to match his hair.

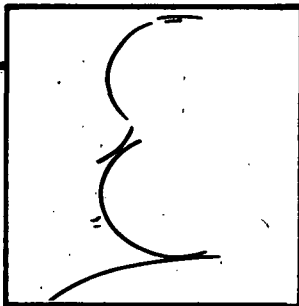
Other recurring characters in the series include Maximum Tubbs, gambler and old friend of Charlie's father; Raoul, the day manager of the Bentley; Eddie Gillespie, who likes everything fast and uniforms, and who tends bar at the Bent-

ley in season; Blake Moss, a sleazy private eye from Albany who tries to muscle Charlie out of the business; Artemis, a circus equestrienne who stables her large, pinkish horse Philip nearby; and Doris, a waitress at the Backstretch Bar on whom Charlie has a major crush. Charlie's interactions with these and with witnesses and suspects help define his character.

Charlie has little confidence in himself and constantly doubts the path he has taken. He does his best to keep on the best side of everyone and cannot understand why they resent his behavior, his success, and his dreams. He loves Saratoga, his lake cottage, his histories of outlaws and lawmen, and his family, but he cannot make these loves fit together the way he thinks they should—the way his cousins think they should. After all, they are good, successful men and they should know. The *Saratoga* series is a study in Charlie's attempt to find the proper road for himself, one that satisfies him without offending those he loves. By the conclusion of *Saratoga Hexameter*, he has learned a little about those he loves, himself, and even Chief Peterson, perhaps enough to allow him to become the successful private eye he seems destined to be.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



Point Break, a sometimes stylish, California-set film starring two of Hollywood's hottest hunks, makes an attempt as a New Wave thriller. For the most part, however, it comes across more Dead Sea than rough-and-tumble Pacific coast. Imagine a crime story with little or no real suspense. Imagine a movie about surfing without any Beach Boys music on the soundtrack. You have just imagined *Point Break*.

The stars of this beachbound escapade are Keanu Reeves, as newly minted F.B.I. agent Johnny Utah, and Patrick Swayze, as Bodhi, a Zen surfer who has a Manson-like hold over his followers. The two spend the movie figuratively, and sometimes literally, banging heads.

Straight out of F.B.I. school, Johnny Utah—the best thing

going for him is his name—is assigned to work at the bank robbery division at Los Angeles bureau headquarters. From the start, the top man in the office doesn't like him. And when he meets his partner, a twenty-two-year veteran played by Gary Busey, the negative vibes are even stronger.

Once the F.B.I. is in place, there has to be a crime for our agents to solve. Bank robbery—twenty-seven of them over three years—is what's foiling the law here. But these are not your standard “stick-'em-up” bank jobs. The gang of four that has been terrorizing L.A. area banks calls itself the Ex-Presidents. The robbers disguise themselves with masks of former presidents Reagan, Carter, Nixon, and Johnson. Since the identity of the bank robbers becomes apparent pretty early on, the burning mystery left in

this film is what happened to President Ford?

The Ex-Presidents offer up a funny line or two, the most memorable being from Nixon, who at the end of one robbery tells his victims, "I am not a crook."

Although Utah and his partner Pappas don't get along at first, they rapidly become best buddies after the rookie agent yells at his complacent companion. The veteran even confides to his young pal his own zany theory that the Ex-Presidents are surfers. He points to a tanline one of the robbers exhibits as he moons the camera in a video tape of one of the robberies.

It becomes Utah's job to ingratiate himself into the surfer crowd. He goes undercover and under water. The first surfer he meets is a woman named Tyler (Lori Petty). She reluctantly becomes his surf teacher and, if you couldn't guess, his girlfriend. And just to churn up the waters a bit, she begins the film as Bodhi's little surfer girl.

Swayze's character is a potentially interesting one, but instead of taking the spiritual high road in this morality play-cum-cops-and-robbers flick, he turns into another overripe hippie dude with no visible means of support. A guy who simply lives for the next death-defying thrill. His Texas

drawl, finely chiseled body, and watchable face are maximized as he spouts a lot of clichés about spiritual life and spends a majority of his time in a tight-fitting wet suit.

Keanu Reeves, known for his work in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, is also a good-looking actor. But his mechanical, Tom Cruise-like performance is certainly not inspiring. His voice shows little emotion, although he does exhibit an ability to shout.

Gary Busey is perhaps the best featured performer here, putting a Nick Nolte spin on his lawman role. It's still troublesome, however, that his initial dislike of his partner was so readily turned into long-lasting buddydom.

Lori Petty, as the only woman with more than a couple of lines, has pretty eyes, but not much else to her credit in her pained girlfriend role.

Special note must be made of the numerous stunt men and women who took the dangerous rides that made parts of the movie quite watchable.

But if you want to watch a good surfing movie, go rent *Endless Summer*. If you want to see a fast-paced bank robbery flick, try *Dog Day Afternoon*. And although the ending of *Point Break* leaves open the possibility, this reviewer requests—please, no sea-quel.

THE STORY THAT WON



The June Mysterious Photo-Edward J. Magdziak, Jr., of able mentions go to Virginia California; Perry E. Pariseau of Owosso, Michigan; Rick Leonard of Lincoln, Nebraska; Joy Hewitt Mann of Spencerville, Ontario, Canada; Garry W. Gibbs of Tallahassee, Florida; Shauna I. Sutcliffe of New York, New York; David Bart of Albuquerque, New Mexico; S. L. Cotton of Granbury, Texas; and M. Whit of Forrest City, Arkansas.

graph contest was won by Clifton, New Jersey. Honor-Thompson of Alameda,

Photo by Algimantas Keyes

THE SOLITARY RIDER by Edward J. Magdziak, Jr.

Stuckey was nervous. Looking up at the Ferris wheel spread out against the sky made his stomach queasy. He was nearing the front of the line and tried to think of an excuse.

"You're next," the man said. He wiped sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief.

"I would like to ride in the green car. The one numbered three."
"Why's that?"

Stuckey blurted out, "I proposed to my wife in that car. I'd like to ride in it again." He was pleased with his reply.

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Whatever."

The wheel comes to a stop. A family of four who look desperately tired get out. Stuckey gets in, and the wheel starts turning. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

He reaches into his jacket and produces a screwdriver. He tries to pry the seat from the thin metal underside. The car begins to descend, and Stuckey sits back up to avoid looking suspicious. As he tries again, the Ferris wheel slows to a stop. He finally gets the seat loose a little and looks under. The microfilm is just where they said it would be. He removes it, stuffs it in his pocket.

Stuckey breathes a sigh of relief as the wheel begins to move again. It goes around twice before it stops again. His car is now fourth from the top. Feeling better, he looks at the car across from him to see Agent Haney showing his I.D. and eating cotton candy.

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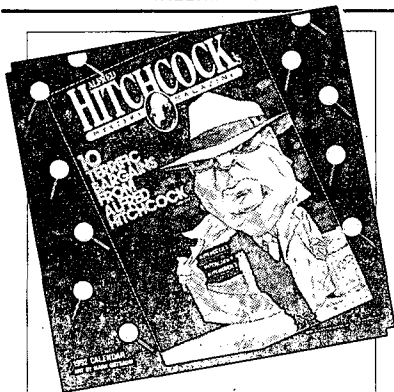
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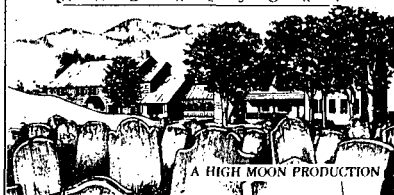
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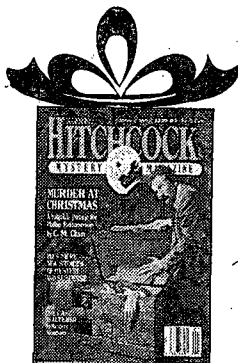
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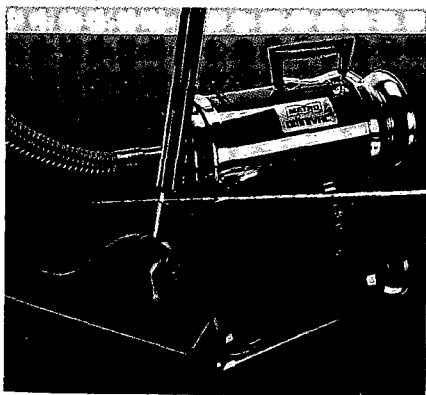
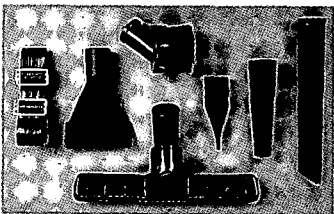
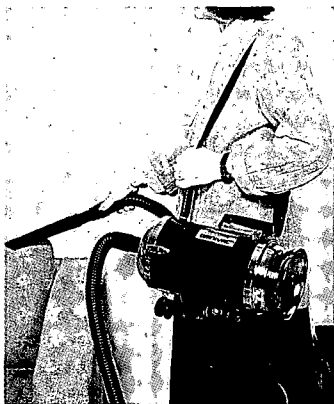
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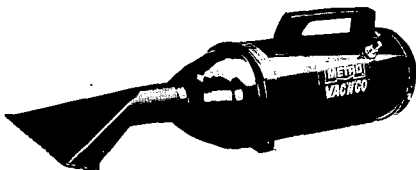
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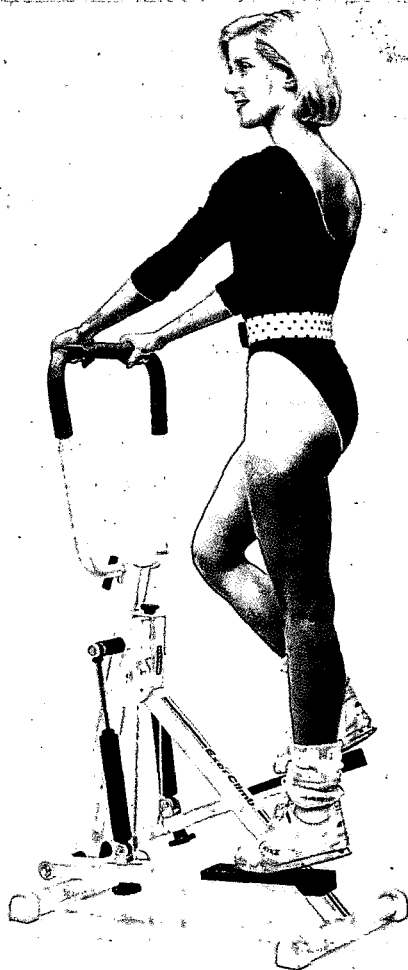
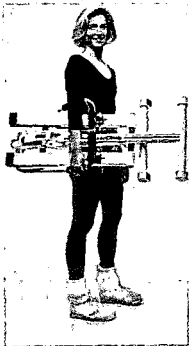
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